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TTY: 771
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March 13, 2024

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chair
House Committee on Judiciary
State House
82 Smith St.
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 7217 – An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses – Assault Weapons

Dear Chair Craven:

Please accept this letter of strong support for H 7217 that was introduced at the request of the Governor. This legislation would ban the possession, sale, and transfer of assault weapons. Possession of assault weapons owned on the effective date of this act would be grandfathered subject to certain registration provisions. Violations are punishable by a fine of up to \$10,000 or up to 10 years imprisonment.

As the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), I am deeply concerned about the human destruction and adverse effects of firearm-related injuries and violence in our State and the nation. Each day, individuals, families, and children must manage the physical, social, and psychological costs associated with preventable, self-inflicted, accidental, and violent injuries and deaths from firearms. No Rhode Islander should have to fear gun violence occurring in their neighborhood, home, and schools. Gun violence is a public health crisis, and the legislation described above will take one of the necessary steps to protect Rhode Island communities.

The Gun Violence Archive is a non-profit, independent data collection and research group with no affiliation with any advocacy organization and defines a mass shooting to be a shooting where at least four people are killed or injured, not including the shooter. Its database shows that, as of March 10, 2024, 116 people have been killed and 270 people have been injured in mass shootings in the United States this year (<https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>).

Assault weapons are linked to mass shootings, are commonplace in mass shootings, and are exceptionally deadly firearms. These weapons are generally capable of firing far more bullets far faster than manual-action hunting rifles. Supported by the National Institute of Justice, the Violence Project notes that, from August 1, 1966, to July 3, 2023, assault weapons were over-represented in mass shootings compared to other forms of gun violence. Twenty-eight percent (28%), including 50% of the deadliest mass shootings, and 39% of the total mass shooting deaths involved an assault weapon (<https://www.theviolenceproject.org/>).

For most Rhode Islanders, the Sandy Hook mass shooting in Connecticut in 2012 hit too close to home. Rhode Island must protect our innocent children. In February 2022 in Rhode Island, a gunman fired hundreds of rounds of ammunition at Providence police officers using multiple firearms, including high-powered assault weapons. In August 2021, a gunman used an AR15 assault weapon to fire upon a Providence police officer responding to a domestic violence call at the gunman's residence.

Each of these injuries and deaths was preventable, and all were tragic. The one common denominator was access to a firearm, and restricting assault weapons can help prevent gun-related deaths and injuries, including those related to mass shootings. I strongly encourage your favorable consideration of this important legislation and urge the Committee to recommend passage.

Sincerely,



Utpala Bandy, MD, MPH
Interim Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Judiciary
The Honorable Jason Knight
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House
Lynne Urbani, Director of House Policy