



March 26, 2025

Rhode Island House of Representatives
Judiciary Committee

RE: Prevent Mass Shootings by Limiting the Sale of Military-Style Assault Weapons

Chair, Vice Chairs, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of GIFFORDS, the gun violence prevention organization led by former Congresswoman, gun owner, and gun violence survivor Gabby Giffords, I am writing to express our support for H 5436. This legislation would help prevent mass casualty shootings by limiting the future sale, manufacture, purchase and possession of assault weapons. Our organization is dedicated to the core principle that every person deserves to live free from fear of violence, and we applaud Rhode Island lawmakers' continued dedication to gun violence prevention.

The availability of unusually dangerous weaponry like assault weapons has fueled an alarming increase in high casualty mass shootings across the nation. Since expiration of the federal law restricting assault weapons in 2004, mass shooting attacks have continued to grow more frequent and more lethal on average, causing more brutal harm and terror to the public, hindering free enjoyment of public spaces, harming children's education and wellbeing, and chilling the free exercise of fundamental rights including speech, worship, and assembly.

Assault weapons are not reasonably designed or commonly used for necessary civilian self-defense purposes but are routinely used for, and uniquely and dangerously effective at, perpetrating mass murder. Restricting the availability of these weapons would not significantly burden law-abiding, responsible individuals' ability to keep and bear arms for self-defense but would likely reduce the frequency and lethality of mass shootings and other harms.

Rhode Island has taken critical action by restricting access to large-capacity magazines. This bill would build on that reform by limiting the sale, manufacture, purchase and possession of firearms that combine certain features indicative of assaultiveness instead of self-defense or sporting purposes. These assault weapons, like the AR-15, include select types of rifles, pistols, and shotguns equipped with specific features that are especially useful in military and criminal

applications instead of civilian self-defense, including features designed to facilitate sustained, high-volume rapid fire targeting large numbers of people. These features include:

- **a revolving cylinder, the ability to accept a detachable magazine, or the capacity to accept a belt ammunition feeding device:** these features allow a shooter to fire large quantities of ammunition quickly, causing massive casualties;
- **a folding, telescoping, or detachable stock:** these features allow a mass shooter to more easily conceal a rifle or shotgun, decreasing the chance they will be detected in advance of a mass shooting;
- **a barrel shroud:** this is designed to protect a shooter's hand from heat generated by the firearm's barrel, particularly during rapid or sustained firing, and allows the shooter to continue to maintain control and accuracy by gripping the barrel while shooting a rifle.
- **pistol grip or thumbhole stock:** these features allow a shooter to more easily manipulate the firearm to shoot at a number of targets more quickly and accurately.
- **a flash suppressor:** this device attaches to the muzzle of a firearm to reduce the visible flash when the gun is fired, decreasing the likelihood that the shooter will be seen by witnesses or law enforcement before they can harm or kill others.
- **pistol with a manufactured weight of fifty ounces or more unloaded:** this targets semi-automatic pistols that are based on rifles or other military weapons, such as Uzi-style and AR-15-style pistols.
- **buffer tube, arm brace, or other part that protrudes horizontally behind the pistol grip and is designed or redesigned to allow or facilitate firing the weapon from the shoulder:** these make concealable firearms more deadly, by allowing a shooter to fire with rifle-like accuracy and firepower. The gunman who killed 10 people at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado in 2021 used an AR-15-style pistole modified with an arm brace.

These firearms have become mass shooters' weapon of choice for a reason. Perpetrators of many of the deadliest shootings in modern American history—including in Las Vegas, Orlando, Sandy Hook Elementary School, Sutherland Springs, El Paso, Robb Elementary School, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Aurora, and Dayton—used assault weapons equipped with large-capacity magazines.

Assault rifles are semiautomatic versions of firearms originally deployed in combat in the Vietnam War. Although these semiautomatic versions of military firearms are marketed to civilians, they are military-grade weapons: the U.S. Army calls semiautomatic rifle fire the “most important firing technique during fast-moving, modern combat” and “most accurate technique of placing a large volume of fire.” Researchers examining civilian active shooter incidents have also found that assailants armed with an assault rifle were able to injure and kill twice the number of people on average compared to assailants armed with a non-assault rifle or handgun.

H 5436 will save lives, while preserving the Second Amendment rights of Rhode Islanders to self-defense. We thank this committee for its previous work to prevent gun violence, and urge a favorable vote on this legislation. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions

Sincerely,

Erin Earp

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GIFFORDS Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence