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March 26th, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

re: support of H5436

Dear Chairman Craven and Committee Members:

I am offering testimony in support of H5436, the Assault Weapons Ban.

Real harm is being done to all of us because of the threat posed by the frequency of mass shootings and the lethality of assault weapons. **You don't have to be shot by an assault rifle to be harmed. The threat is sufficient.** The lethality of assault weapons amplifies the threat.

In our daily lives we know the threat is real, so we take steps to mitigate the potential damage. One example is active shooter drills. Active shooter drills are done in numerous places, such as churches, schools, and hospitals. With the good intention of protecting our children, we put our kids through active shooter drills, that all too frequently result in children having a trauma reaction.

We know the threat is real because the number of gun deaths in the United States is staggering, the number of nonfatal gun injuries are more than double that number. This is amplified by the number of bystanders and witnesses who are exposed to the traumatic event. In addition, family members are traumatized by the way their loved one died and they experience a wide range of effects from complicated grief to trauma disorders.

It is also important to understand that crisis events uncover prior trauma or loss, even if it is unrelated to the shooting. Research reveals that trauma and loss are common. Trauma effects are global, impacting every aspect of a person, including cognitive processing, emotional dysregulation, and physical health. Is it a coincidence that currently there is a mental health crisis and a youth suicide crisis in America?

We can take a major step toward reducing this avoidable pernicious threat by making weapons of war unavailable to civilians. I urge passage of this bill.

Rev. Eugene T. Dyszlewski
Commissioner of Social Justice
Rhode Island State Council of Churches