

## Ariana Costa

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**From:** Paul Larkin <plarkin@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 25, 2025 7:17 AM  
**To:** House Judiciary Committee  
**Subject:** Opposition for HB 5890

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Completed

To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to express my opposition to HB 5890 – Weapons – Prohibition on Firearm Possession Under 18, which would make it unlawful for anyone under the age of 18 to possess a firearm. While I appreciate the intent to enhance public safety, this bill overlooks the significant harm it would inflict on junior shooting programs and the young Rhode Islanders who participate in competitive shooting sports. I urge you to reconsider this legislation due to its unintended consequences on these valuable activities.

Junior shooting programs, such as those sponsored by the Rhode Island State Rifle and Revolver Association, 4-H Shooting Sports, and the National Rifle Association, provide supervised, structured environments where youth learn firearm safety, discipline, and marksmanship. These programs are not about unrestricted access but about fostering responsibility under the guidance of trained instructors. Participants, often as young as 10 or 12, use firearms in controlled settings like ranges or competitions, building skills that translate to lifelong lessons in focus and accountability. HB 5890, by blanketly prohibiting possession for those under 18, would effectively dismantle these programs, as possession is inherent to their operation—even when supervised.

The impact on junior shooting competitions would be equally devastating. Rhode Island youth currently compete in events like the NRA National Junior Air Rifle Championships, the Civilian Marksmanship Program's Regional Matches, and state-level tournaments, often earning accolades and scholarships. These competitions require participants to handle firearms under strict safety protocols, a practice that HB 5890 would criminalize. For example, a 16-year-old sharpshooter training for a national event could no longer legally possess a rifle, even at a range with a coach present. This would bar talented young athletes from pursuing their sport, diminishing opportunities for recognition and personal growth. States like Pennsylvania and Ohio, with robust junior programs, allow such activities with appropriate oversight—Rhode Island should not fall behind by adopting an overly restrictive approach.

Current Rhode Island law already regulates youth firearm use effectively. R.I.G.L. § 11-47-33 prohibits minors from possessing handguns without adult supervision or specific exemptions (e.g., range use), while hunting laws require licenses and adult accompaniment for those under 15. These measures strike a balance, ensuring safety without stifling legitimate activities. HB 5890, however, offers no carve-outs for supervised training or competition, casting a wide net that punishes responsible youth rather than targeting misuse. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, which oversees hunter education, and local ranges like the Midstate Gun Club rely on youth participation to sustain their programs—HB 5890 threatens their viability.

Rather than a blanket ban, I encourage the Committee to consider targeted solutions that address illegal firearm possession while preserving junior shooting programs. Exemptions for supervised range use, competitions, or training under licensed instructors would protect public safety without sidelining an entire generation of young shooters. I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB 5890 and safeguard these constructive opportunities for Rhode Island's youth. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Paul Larkin

Richmond, RI