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Chair Carol McEntee and Members
House Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly

RE: Opposition to H7553 –RELATING TO CRIMINAL OFFENSES–WEAPONS

Dear Chair McEntee and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to respectfully express my opposition to **House Bill 7553**, which would establish a new “review and appeal” process for individuals denied a handgun permit pursuant to R.I.G.L. §§ 11-47-11 or 11-47-18.

While I understand the intent to ensure fairness and transparency, this bill creates a redundant, burdensome, unnecessary, and impractical system that could unintentionally undermine public safety, which should remain our top priority.

Rhode Island already provides applicants with an established avenue to challenge permit denials through the court system, including appeals to the Attorney General’s Office, ensuring due process without creating unnecessary procedures. This existing framework effectively balances fairness and public safety, making additional review processes redundant and potentially less effective.

Scheduling mandatory meetings within such a short time frame imposes an unnecessary administrative burden on police chiefs, who are already operating with limited staffing and increasing call volumes, diverting them from core public safety responsibilities.

Additionally, this legislation requires police chiefs and licensing authorities to re-engage with applicants after a denial decision has been made following a comprehensive investigative process. Permit denials are not issued casually. They are based on an extensive review of an applicant’s criminal history, mental health considerations where legally permitted, documented behavioral concerns, domestic violence indicators, restraining orders, substance abuse concerns, and other risk factors. Requiring a chief or licensing authority to meet with an applicant simply because the applicant disagrees with the outcome is both inefficient and unnecessary. It essentially requires departments to re-litigate decisions already made with careful deliberation and supported by documentation.

H7553 further requires the licensing authority to issue a written decision within seven (7) days after the meeting. This deadline is similarly unreasonable, especially when chiefs may need additional time to verify or review any “supplemental documentation” that the applicant may submit. The

combined deadlines imposed by this bill will create rushed decision-making and increase the likelihood of mistakes, inconsistencies, and legal disputes.

The bill also specifies that the reconsideration meeting is informal and that the licensing authority may receive and consider documents “without regard to statutory and common law rules.” While this is described as an informal process, it creates an unstructured system that invites confusion and inconsistency. A process involving firearm licensing decisions should not be governed by vague evidentiary standards or informal procedures that can lead to uneven application across municipalities.

Additionally, the bill allows an appeal to the Superior Court by way of a miscellaneous petition and provides for a trial de novo. A trial de novo requires the matter to be essentially heard again from the beginning. This will encourage increased litigation and result in additional legal costs and administrative burdens for municipalities and the State. This is not an efficient use of resources and will further strain an already overburdened court system.

Perhaps most concerning is the provision allowing the Superior Court to award attorneys’ fees, costs, and filing fees to the prevailing applicant if the court finds there was “no justiciable issue” or that the licensing authority did not have a “good faith basis” for the denial. This creates significant financial risk for municipalities. More importantly, it could pressure licensing authorities to approve permits despite legitimate public safety concerns, to avoid the risk of litigation and potential attorneys' fees. Firearm permitting decisions must be based on sound judgment and public safety—not fear of financial penalty.

Finally, the bill's confidentiality provisions raise additional concerns. While the privacy of applicants is important, H7553 makes the reconsideration process and Superior Court proceedings confidential unless the applicant requests a public hearing. This reduces transparency in matters involving public safety and could prevent legitimate public accountability for how licensing decisions are reviewed and overturned.

For all these reasons, House Bill H7553 is redundant, resource-intensive, and places unnecessary burdens on police departments and licensing authorities. It creates unrealistic procedural requirements, increases litigation risk, and may undermine the integrity of firearm licensing decisions that are intended to protect the public.

Rhode Island already has an appeal structure in place through the Supreme Court and the Attorney General’s Office. This legislation does not enhance public safety or improve the licensing process; it complicates it.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the House Judiciary Committee to vote to oppose the bill.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to public safety.

Respectfully,



Colonel Michael J. Winquist
Chief of Police
Cranston Police Department