

Chairperson McEntee, Representative Messier, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to respectfully oppose House Bill 7557, the "Rhode Island Firearm Industry Accountability Act of 2026."

At first glance, this bill appears to reinforce responsible business practices already required under existing state and federal law. However, upon closer review, it creates a new and expansive civil liability framework that exposes lawful firearm industry members to significant legal risk based on vague and subjective standards.

Firearm dealers and manufacturers are already heavily regulated. They must comply with strict federal and state requirements, including background checks, recordkeeping, reporting obligations, and prohibitions on unlawful sales. This bill does not meaningfully strengthen those requirements. Instead, it introduces undefined terms such as "reasonable controls," "reasonable cause," and "foreseeable risk," which leave compliance open to interpretation after the fact.

Of particular concern is the provision creating a rebuttable presumption of liability. This approach undermines a fundamental principle of our legal system, that individuals and businesses are presumed innocent until proven otherwise. Under this framework, a lawful business may effectively be presumed to have done something wrong simply because a harmful outcome occurred, even if it followed all applicable laws. This shifts the burden onto the defendant to prove compliance, rather than requiring the plaintiff to prove wrongdoing.

Additionally, the bill authorizes civil actions not only by the state, but also by private individuals and municipalities, and mandates the award of attorney's fees to prevailing plaintiffs. This structure incentivizes litigation and may encourage lawsuits based on subjective interpretations rather than clear violations of law.

Importantly, individuals intent on committing crimes are unlikely to be deterred by additional civil liability placed on lawful businesses. Instead, this bill risks burdening responsible retailers and manufacturers who are already operating in compliance with extensive regulations.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to hold House Bill 7557 for further study and not advance it to the House floor.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

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