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Testimony on House Bill 7557, Firearm Industry Accountability House Judiciary Committee April 8, 2026

Good afternoon members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is Jocelyn Antonio. I'm a resident of Cumberland Rhode Island. I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity as a public health professional.

I strongly urge your favorable consideration and support for H-7557 – An Act Relating to Health and Safety – The Rhode Island Firearm Industry Accountability Act of 2026, sponsored by Representative Donovan, and co-sponsored by Representatives Boylan, Speakman, Carson, Tanzi, Potter, Fogarty, Ajello, McGaw, and Casimiro.

This legislation seeks to establish clear, state-level standards of conduct for the firearm industry. By creating a pathway for civil accountability, this bill ensures that firearm manufacturers and dealers who fail to implement reasonable safety controls can be held responsible in state court.

The Public Health and Public Safety Crisis

Gun violence is a leading cause of premature death in the United States. According to the **American Public Health Association (APHA), it is a public health crisis** [1]. However, in public health, we recognize that gun violence is not inevitable, it very much is preventable through systemic intervention.

We must be very clear: this legislation is not about the Second Amendment. It is about **data-driven approach to public safety**. It is about protecting our communities, schools, and workplaces safe from preventable harm. Public health and public safety are fundamentally intertwined [2]. When trauma, fear, and violence become normalized, they undermine mental health, disrupt family stability, and places enormous economic and operational strain on our healthcare systems.

The “Upstream” Intervention

Public Health is the science of preventing injury and death before they occur. From a public health approach perspective, House Bill 7557 is a vital **“upstream” intervention. Upstream policies address the conditions that allow gun violence to proliferate in the first place** [3]. By regulating the supply chain and commercial environment, we can reduce the flow of illegal weapons with minimal burden to law-abiding individuals [4].

Alignment with Evidence-Based Interventions

This bill applies the **same evidence-based strategies that have successfully reduced mortality** in other sectors.

A primary example is the **automobile industry**. In the 1950s public health physicians shifted their focus from “who caused the accident” to “what caused the injury. They found that drivers were dying not just from human error, but from a lack of safety features that lead to ruptured vital organs, major arteries ripped apart and occupants being thrown out the vehicles [5]. By holding the **auto industry accountable for safety standards, we didn’t stop people from driving; we simply made driving survivable** [3], [4]. This shift led to continuous innovation and testing within the auto industry and substantial reductions in fatalities over time.

Another comparable public health approach can be seen in **tobacco control**. Since 1964, the **prevalence of cigarette smoking in the United States has declined** by more than 70%, due in large part to comprehensive, population-level strategies [6]. Litigation against the tobacco industry in the 1990s contributed to comprehensive warning labels, financial accountability for healthcare costs, and investments in research and prevention particularly in targeting youth smoking [7].

By allowing for civil action as proposed in House Bill 7557, **Rhode Island will create an incentive for the firearm industry to do more to reduce gun violence and incentivize safer practices**. These may include firearm traceability, enhancing safe storage and childproof technologies, and strengthening oversight of distribution channels [5].

Conclusion

Historically, the firearm industry has been subject to fewer regulatory and accountability mechanisms than other consumer products [4], [6], [8]. While federal action in this area remains limited, states have an important opportunity to advance evidence-based policies that reduce harm.

House Bill 7557 would treat firearms more consistently with other consumer product by encouraging safety standards and preventative measures. It creates incentives for the industry to invest in safety and risk reduction rather than bear the costs of preventable harm [6], [7].

Guns violence is currently the leading cause of death among children and adolescents in the United States [3]. In Rhode Island, the gun death rate in 2023 was 5.29 per 100,000 residents [9]. Gun violence disproportionately affects domestic violence victims and Black Americans, and it imposes an estimated \$409 million annual economic burden on the state [9].

For these reasons, Rhode Island has a clear and compelling interest in advancing policies that promote accountability and prevention within the firearm industry. I urge you to **support and pass House Bill 7557**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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