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From: Christopher Buontempo <cjbuontempo@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 7, 2026 2:35 PM
To: House Judiciary Committee; Rep. McEntee, Carol Hagan; Rep. Knight, Jason; Rep. Dawson, Matthew S.; Rep. Ajello, Edith H.; Rep. Batista, Jose F.; Rep. Bennett, David A.; Rep. Caldwell, Justine A.; Rep. Casimiro, Julie A.; Rep. Corvese, Arthur J.; Rep. Craven, Robert E.; Rep. Cruz, Cherie L.; Rep. Felix, Leonela; Rep. Hopkins, Marie A.; Rep. Noret, Thomas E.; Rep. Place, David J.
Subject: Opposition to HB8073 and Erosion of Trust

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Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I write to oppose House Bill H 8073 in the strongest possible terms.

In 2025, the General Assembly enacted the Rhode Island Assault Weapons Ban Act. That legislation was advanced, debated, and ultimately passed on a clear and repeated premise: it would regulate future conduct (manufacture, sale, and transfer) while preserving the rights of individuals who already lawfully possessed affected firearms. That was not incidental and was the condition on which the law was sold to the public and, by all appearances, the condition on which votes were secured.

Representative Jason Knight, the bill's sponsor, stated unequivocally, *"A person that owns one of the weapons today... remains legal, and they don't have to do anything to be legal."* He went on to state, *"You don't have to... lift one single finger to remain legal."* Those were categorical representations to Rhode Island residents, and HB8073 reverses them.

It imposes felony penalties and up to 10 years' imprisonment, significant fines, and forfeiture on individuals who did exactly what the law allowed them to do and what the State explicitly told them they could continue to do. This is not a policy refinement. It is a bait-and-switch executed through legislation.

The issue presented by H 8073 is not confined to firearms policy. It goes to the integrity of the legislative process itself. The sequence is straightforward:

- The State authorized continued possession of certain firearms;
- It affirmatively assured the public that lawful owners would not be affected;
- Citizens relied on those assurances;
- Within a year, the State proposes to criminalize that same possession.

If that sequence is permissible, then legislative assurances, particularly those used to secure passage of controversial laws, are effectively meaningless.

Members of this Committee should ask a basic question: What reliance, if any, are Rhode Islanders

entitled to place on representations made during legislative debate? This is foundational to public trust. A legislature that reverses its own explicit assurances within a year invites the conclusion that those assurances were knowingly untrue. Rejecting HB8073 would not represent a retreat from last year's policy. It would represent adherence to it, and to the assurances that accompanied it.

With respect to HB7083 itself, the bill marks an extreme departure from traditional regulatory approaches. Rhode Island would be among the first jurisdictions to enact a possession ban of this scope affecting previously lawful owners. This is clearly unconstitutional. Under *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the Second Amendment protects the right of law-abiding citizens to possess arms "in common use" for lawful purposes. *Caetano v. Massachusetts* reaffirmed that this protection extends to modern, widely owned arms. And most importantly, *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen* established that modern firearm regulations must be consistent with the Nation's historical tradition of firearm regulation. The burden is on the State to identify a relevant historical analogue. There is no such analogue here and no historical tradition in this country of prohibiting possession of commonly owned firearms by law-abiding citizens, forcing citizens to relinquish arms that were lawfully acquired; or reversing prior legislative assurances and criminalizing continued possession.

I also urge the Committee to reject any proposals that would condition firearm ownership on substantial financial requirements, including liability insurance concepts. Such measures function as a pay-to-exercise regime for a constitutional right. They introduce ongoing financial burdens that many citizens cannot meet and effectively delegate gatekeeping authority to private insurers. Courts have long been skeptical of conditioning constitutional rights on the ability to pay, similar to poll taxes.

I urge you to reject House Bill H 8073 and to oppose any related measures that retroactively criminalize lawful conduct or impose financial barriers on the exercise of constitutional rights.

Respectfully,
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