

March 13, 2024

To: Chairman Craven and Honorable House Judiciary Members

From: Linda Ohsberg

Re: Support of Pending Legislation to be heard on March 13, 2024 - H 7373 and H 7217

Sent via email to: HouseJudiciary@rilegislature.gov

My name is Linda Ohsberg; I live at 70 Saw Mill Dr., in North Kingston, RI. My representative is Julie Casimiro.

I am writing in support of pending legislation that bans assault weapons in the state (Caldwell H 7373) and requires safe storage of all firearms (Knight H 7217). As gun violence devastates communities across the country, we must do everything we can to prevent this from happening here - to prevent homicides, suicides and gun injuries. We cannot wait until this epidemic reaches our doorstep. The sequela of these events is a major trauma not only to survivors, the families involved and those who witness these assaults, but to each and every one of us who read about the endless cycle of gun violence in this country. It is indisputable that our country leads the developed world in these tragedies. And yet, we have the tools necessary to reduce the carnage. So far, we have just chosen not to use them and to bow to the power of the gun lobby. This pending legislation does nothing to infringe on the 2nd amendment right of those who claim it as a shield. We had an assault weapons ban in the country in the past, and it did reduce the crimes associated with these weapons.

Little children and other family members are being killed by youngsters who have unfettered access to these firearms. Suicides are frequently occurring when there is easy access to a firearm during a time of the victims' mental health crisis. Perpetrators of mass shootings are often young people who have unfettered access to guns in their home. It is my opinion, backed up by the American Psychological Association (July 11, 2022, volume 53, no.6) who states in the opening paragraph: "As mass shootings repeatedly erupt in schools, grocery stores, and other establishments we visit every week, Americans are living in fear. For children and teens, whose mental health is already in crisis, the ongoing backdrop of violence is steadily eroding the sense of well-being, safety, and efficacy known to be essential for healthy development." I suggest, through my years of serving as a professional social worker, this violence affects all of us, including adults. Many of us pause to consider whether our routine puts us at risk of harm in a public place or whether our loved ones are going to return home after such an outing. Young people who witness this carnage or are survivors of a mass shooting will never overcome this trauma. They may do better with the skilled intervention of mental health workers (that's another problem where we have not done well to provide services needed), but they will carry this trauma with them for the rest of their lives. We don't have to live with this. We have solutions available to us.

Lest you think there is no economic consequence to our failure to reduce violent gun deaths in this country, I have relatives who live in Germany who have not visited for years as they were stunned by the violence in this country. They were visiting in Boston at the time of the Marathon Bombing in 2013. They have young children and do not want them exposed to the all-too-common risks of deadly assault in this country. While there are incidents of gun violence in all countries, none are as common as here in the US. So I would postulate that there are other who decide not to visit the US or to relocate here which may not yet be a major drawback of our failure to act, but eventually the choice they have of where to visit includes many other countries that are not known for the threat of daily violence in their communities.

Therefore, I ask that you look favorably on this legislation as a step toward securing our communities, giving our children a better chance at becoming balanced, stable adults, and allow the rest of us to feel a little safer going to the grocery store, a concert, a movie, to church, a parade, a shopping center, and many other places, and for children to feel safe at school again. Please pass these gun safety bills out of committee and on to the House floor for a vote with a recommendation for passage. This would be the most common sense legislation you could pass this year. Thank you for your consideration of these bills.