



May 21, 2024

Representative Robert E. Craven, Sr., Chair
House Judiciary Committee

RE: Testimony in Support of House Bill 8154, An Act Relating to Courts and Civil Procedure – Family Court

United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI) is writing to express its support for House Bill 8154. This bill expands the records accessible during the background check associated with the purchase of a firearm for individuals under 22 years old, which would potentially prevent individuals with a history of justice involvement as juveniles from purchasing firearms. UWRI is dedicated to building safe communities, and this limitation on firearm purchases brings the federal Bipartisan Safer Communities Act home for Rhode Islanders.

Gun violence has significant and lasting impacts on the physical and mental health of a community. The direct injuries and fatalities resulting from gun violence are immediate and pressing, but the long-term effects of trauma and destabilization can erode community trust, contribute to social disintegration, and incur substantial economic costs. This frame of gun violence as a long-term issue reflects the fact that 67% of gun deaths in Rhode Island are suicides, and 70% of female intimate partner homicide victims in Rhode Island were killed with a gun. Notably, the rate of gun deaths in Rhode Island increased 73% from 2011 to 2020 (EveryStat.org). Part of reducing gun violence is tightening the regulation on individuals who can purchase firearms. This is not a single solution, but it is an important step towards creating safe communities.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this bill, and for the work you do for Rhode Islanders every day.

Very best,
Peggy Desjarlais
Program Officer, Housing and Economic Development Policy

