

Good afternoon.

My name is Jen Saarinen, and I am a math teacher at Kickemuit Middle School in the Bristol Warren Regional School District. I am here to testify in strong support of **House Bill 5436 – The Rhode Island Assault Weapons Ban Act of 2025**.

As an educator with more than two decades of experience, I have participated in more **lockdown drills, active shooter drills, and frightening conversations with students** than I can count. But I also carry a **personal experience** of gun violence in schools that has shaped me to this day.

In 1993, when I was an eighth-grade student, my small Michigan community was shattered. On a cold December day, **several teachers and our high school principal were injured, and our superintendent was murdered**. Thankfully, it happened after school hours, so most students had left campus. While the weapon used in that tragedy was not an assault weapon, the outcome was the same: **injury and death**.

Almost **32 years later**, that day **still replays in my mind**—especially every time another mass shooting dominates the news. Whether it's a school, a grocery store, a shopping mall, or a community gathering—the trauma **never fades**. And I still struggle to understand why **legislators continue to delay action**. Thoughts and prayers are **not enough**. They are **reactive**. We need to be **proactive** in Rhode Island—through **policy and change**.

Let's be clear: **Assault weapons are designed for one purpose—to kill as many people as possible, as quickly as possible**. These **weapons of war** have no place in our schools, our communities, or on the streets of a civilized society.

We cannot afford to wait. **Firearms are now the leading cause of death for children in America**. How many more lives must be lost before we act? Rhode Island **must take action now** to ensure we do **not add to the statistics**.

I am encouraged to see **Governor McKee** make banning assault weapons a priority by including it in the state budget. Budgets reflect values—and this sends a clear message: **the time for action is now**.

Thank you to Representatives Knight, Caldwell, Boylan, Speakman, McEntee, Ajello, Kazarian, Craven, Dawson, and Felix for sponsoring House Bill 5436. Your leadership is meaningful, and your support gives us hope.

**If education is the foundation of our democracy, then public schools are the cornerstone of our communities.**  
**Aren't they worth protecting? Aren't our children worth protecting?**

**Policy. Change. Action.**  
**Pass the assault weapons ban this year.**

Thank you.