

Anabella Mayorga

From: Melissa Carden <melissa@ricagv.org>
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 10:54 AM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: In Strong Support of H5436
Attachments: RICAGVH5436Testimony.pdf

Dear Clerk DiMezza:

Please find my testimony attached in PDF format in support of H5436.

Thank you.

Melissa
646-884-1505

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Melissa Carden, Executive Director
Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence
melissa@ricagv.org



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Melissa Carden
Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence
Providence

March 23, 2025

RE: Support of H5436

Dear Chair Craven and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Did you know that a recent Children's Defense Fund's Parent and Child Trends Survey by YouGov found fear of a school shooting the second most common worry for children between 6 and 17 years old and their parents? And one-third of children surveyed said they are worried about a shooting happening at their school. We are clearly failing our kids. But we have an opportunity to keep our communities safer from gun violence by finally regulating assault weapons in Rhode Island. It's way past time for a vote.

This past Valentine's Day marked seven years since the Parkland massacre, when 14 students and three staff members were slaughtered. The shooter used a legally purchased AR-15, a lethal military-style rifle often used in mass shootings, including at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, when 26 lives were violently taken. And in our own backyard in early January, 7 months pregnant Danielle Arruda and her two young children, Adel and Felix, were brutally murdered with a semiautomatic weapon. These types of weapons are legal in Rhode Island.

We can reject weapons of war and make our communities safer by joining our neighbors in MA and CT and finally passing Rep. Knight's H5436. We are in a unique position to pass the law this legislative session, with the Senate President indicating he will no longer stand in the way, very strong support from Governor McKee and the other state executive office holders, as well as partners including the NEA-RI, the AFL-CIO, Kids Count RI and many others.

Almost 26 years after the mass shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado, according to a Pew Research Center survey a majority of public K-12 teachers (59%) say they are at least somewhat worried about the possibility of a shooting ever happening at their school. This includes 18% who say they're extremely or very worried. We are failing our teachers, too.

We know the majority of Rhode Islanders and legislators support regulating assault weapons. At the Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence we have been fighting for this for over a decade and it is our #1 priority this session. It is constitutional and for those who currently own these weapons, they can keep them as long as they follow the law for certification.

Research shows states with stricter gun safety laws have lower levels of gun violence and in Rhode Island we have passed many over the past decade. We applaud our legislators for passing the safe storage law last year, but our work isn't finished. We have an obligation to do all we can to keep our children and communities safe, and in the absence of federal legislation regulating assault weapons, Rhode Island must take action.

There is no one answer in the fight against gun violence, but regulating assault weapons is one step we can take in Rhode Island. There is no place for weapons of war in our communities.

Our children deserve to be safe from gun violence in their schools, their neighborhoods, their homes, grocery stores, theaters, churches, synagogues and everywhere else they go. We all deserve to live free from the threat of gun violence.

Please vote this out of committee and recommend passage. It's time for a vote.

The Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence (RICAGV), a coalition of organizations, activists, advocates, educators, legislators, and community members who address gun violence as an urgent public health issue. Since 2013, RICAGV has utilized the collective power of its membership and grassroots organizing methods to advance programs and policies that will reduce gun violence of all types resulting in safer, healthier Rhode Island communities.