

Ariana Costa

From: Paul Larkin <plarkin@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 7:08 AM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Subject: Opposition to HB 5436

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To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 5436, the Rhode Island Assault Weapons Ban Act of 2025. While I understand the intent to enhance public safety, this legislation targets a category of firearms that is demonstrably rarely used in criminal activity—both nationally and within our state. I urge you to reconsider this bill in light of the evidence, which shows that such a ban would have minimal impact on reducing crime while unnecessarily infringing on the rights of law-abiding Rhode Islanders.

Nationally, the use of so-called "assault weapons" in crimes is exceedingly uncommon. According to data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program, rifles of all types—including those labeled as assault weapons—account for only a small fraction of firearm-related homicides. In 2019, for example, of the 13,922 homicides where supplemental weapon data was available, rifles were used in just 364 cases, or approximately 2.6%. Handguns, by contrast, were used in 6,368 cases—nearly 46% of the total. Even when considering all firearm crimes, not just homicides, studies such as one from the National Institute of Justice suggest that assault weapons are used in less than 7% of incidents, with estimates often as low as 2%. This data underscores that the overwhelming majority of gun crimes involve handguns, not rifles, making the focus on assault weapons disproportionate to their actual role in criminal activity.

In Rhode Island, the evidence is even more compelling. Our state has one of the lowest gun violence rates in the nation, ranking fourth-lowest in gun death rates in 2023 according to Giffords. With an average of 52 gun deaths per year, including both homicides and suicides, the use of rifles—let alone those classified as assault weapons—is a statistical rarity. The Rhode Island State Police reported seizing 326 guns in 2023, with a 41% increase in weapons violations, yet the vast majority of these incidents were tied to narcotics trafficking and involved handguns, not rifles. Specific cases cited by proponents of the ban, such as the occasional recovery of an AR-15 in drug busts or isolated incidents, represent outliers rather than a trend. The reality is that rifles of any kind, including assault weapons, are almost never used to commit crimes in Rhode Island, as confirmed by groups like the NRA-ILA, which have consistently highlighted this fact in legislative debates.

HB 5436 would impose a sweeping ban on a broad category of semi-automatic firearms, including many commonly used for lawful purposes such as hunting, sport shooting, and self-defense. Yet the data shows no clear correlation between the availability of these firearms and crime rates. States with similar bans, like Connecticut and Massachusetts, still experience gun violence primarily driven by handguns, not rifles. Meanwhile, Rhode Island's existing gun laws—among the strongest in the nation—have already contributed to our low rates of violence without targeting these specific firearms.

Rather than pursuing a ban that affects law-abiding citizens while doing little to address the root causes of crime, I encourage the General Assembly to focus on proven strategies: enhancing mental health resources, cracking down on illegal firearms trafficking, and addressing the socioeconomic factors that drive violence. These measures would target the actual tools and circumstances of crime—predominantly handguns and underlying societal issues—rather than a symbolic category of firearms rarely implicated in wrongdoing.

I respectfully ask that you vote NO on HB 5436. Let us base our policies on facts, not fear, and preserve the rights of Rhode Islanders while addressing crime in ways that genuinely make a difference. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Larkin

Richmond, RI