



Mayor of Providence

Brett P. Smiley

March 26, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Chair  
House Judiciary Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith St  
Providence RI, 02903

Dear Chair Craven and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I write this letter in strong support of House Bill 5436—a statewide ban on assault weapons in Rhode Island—and believe that every level of government should be engaged in the fight against the nationwide gun violence epidemic.

Firearms designed and employed for direct combat should not be in our neighborhoods. Nationally, since 2015, at least nine out of the ten mass shooting incidents with the most casualties involved at least one firearm equipped with a high-capacity magazine and at least one assault weapon. In Rhode Island, 68 percent of homicides involve a gun, and the rate of gun deaths increased by 36 percent from 2012 to 2021. Eighty percent of homicides take place in Providence County, which includes the cities of Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls, as well as the towns of Cranston, East Providence, and Woonsocket—where a majority of our residents live.

Through the passage of common-sense gun laws and the education and engagement efforts of community leaders like the Nonviolence Institute, Rhode Island had the lowest gun death rate in the U.S. in 2022. However, there is more work to be done. As the Mayor of the largest city in Rhode Island, I see firsthand the impacts of gun violence in our community. Each shooting affects entire neighborhoods, leaving both physical and emotional trauma for survivors and their families.

Nine states and Washington, D.C., have already banned assault weapons. Additionally, a federal prohibition on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines was in effect from 1994 to 2004. We call on our Rhode Island lawmakers to enact a ban on assault weapons to build upon the state's existing prohibition on high-capacity magazines and ensure that our communities remain free from deadly firearms.

We commend the General Assembly for enacting common-sense gun laws, including the state's firearm secure storage laws, which set a strong precedent for similar legislation across the U.S. However, we must continue taking action to prevent gun violence and keep our communities safe—this includes enacting a statewide ban on assault weapons.

Sincerely,

  
Brett P. Smiley  
Mayor