

Written testimony in support of H.B. 5436: Rhode Island Assault Weapons Ban Act

Place of Residence: 211 Bowen St., Providence RI, 02912

Date of Hearing: March 26, 2025

To Chair Craven and the Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience with you as not only a student at Brown University and resident of Rhode Island, but also as a school shooting survivor and gun violence prevention activist.

When I was just twelve years old, I was sitting outside at my middle school when shots rang through the air from the high school next door. A shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in my hometown of Parkland, Florida took the lives of 17 students and teachers, as well as injuring 17 others.. The sound of gunshots and screams, the rush of first responders to both schools, the videos of students being shot and killed—these moments are forever burned into my mind.

I developed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of my experience. I can no longer enjoy fireworks. I experience almost constant paranoia when I am out in public. And I've spent countless hours in classrooms staring at the door, waiting for a shooter to step through it. Gun violence does not just physically maim its direct victims: it destroys the psyches of all those in its vicinity.

My experience as a survivor of gun violence and my subsequent involvement with gun violence prevention, along with my extensive knowledge of the perpetuating factors of gun violence in the US, compel me to support H5436, which would ban assault weapons in the state of Rhode Island. Statistically, the growing prevalence of assault weapons in this country and this state is behind the increasing frequency and lethality of mass shootings. In fact, research from Everytown quantifies that the use of an assault weapon in a mass shooting incident leads to double the amount of deaths, and over six times the amount of people shot.¹

H5436 would prohibit the sale, possession, and distribution of assault weapons within the state of Rhode Island, marking a massive step this legislature can take to end gun violence in our state. We've heard time and time again: "Guns don't kill people, people do". And in some sense that's correct—this bill would not single handedly stop gun violence. But this legislature has a duty to prevent the worst of the worst—to ensure that no one can wield a military-grade weapon designed to inflict mass casualties. Pass this bill, so that no more children have to go through what I did.

Sincerely,

Zoe Weissman

¹"Assault Weapons and High-Capacity Magazines." Everytown Research & Policy, everytownresearch.org/report/assault-weapons-and-high-capacity-magazines/?_gl=1.