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Good morning. My name is Jason Gawencki, and I strongly oppose House Bill 5800: An Act Requiring Registration of All Firearms.

The right of citizens to possess weapons has long been a topic of debate. Firearms in the wrong hands can be dangerous. This leads us to the dilemma of how to effectively prevent firearms from getting into the hands of the wrong people. I believe that a mandatory registration is not only the wrong approach, but it deters firearms from staying in the hands of the correct people, while doing nothing to prevent them from the wrong people.

Although there are many reasons to oppose this bill, I will limit my comments to three simple objections. First, a registration duplicates the existing database of handguns maintained by the Department of Public Safety. The same section of the current law that HB 5800 proposes to amend requires the Department of Public Safety to be given a record of every handgun sale in Connecticut, except for antique handguns of those sold or transferred from one licensed dealer to another. A registration of all firearms duplicates this law, while taking resources to document long guns, which are typically not used in violent crimes as they are not easily concealed.

Secondly, the Supreme Court has determined in the case United State vs. Haynes (1968) that the Fifth Amendment is a valid defense against failure to register a firearm. Since registering a firearm that someone is not legally allowed to possess would be self-incrimination, registration laws will not be successfully prosecuted against any decent defense attorney. Unfortunately the courts have ruled that someone who is legally allowed to possess a firearm, but fails to register it, can be charged with a crime, which in this case would be a felony. Firearm registration is a direct attempt to hinder law abiding citizens from exercising their rights guaranteed by both the US Constitution and the Connecticut Constitution, while not imposing any additional penalties on illegally possessed firearms.

And finally, the proposed bill only affects those aware of it and willing to follow it. Most citizens are unaware of the specifics of current laws. To prove my point, I would like to note that the proposed bill requires any lost or stolen firearm to be reported within ten days, while current law requires lost or stolen firearms to be reported to the local police within 72 hours (CGS Chapter 943, Sec. 53-202g). Yet the proposed legislation does not change this law, it simply gives two different deadlines. If the legislature is capable of overlooking the specifics of current firearm law, then the citizens of Connecticut may also miss something. The primary difference is that if a citizen forgets to register a weapon within 10 days, he becomes a felon, and permanently loses certain rights. Meanwhile, anyone who illegally owns a firearm has no reason to register it, and no additional likelihood of getting caught.

In conclusion, I would suggest that instead of making things more difficult for lawful firearm owners, actions be taken to prevent firearms from getting into the hands of those who cannot legally possess them. Or using the resources needed for a registry to further fund state and local police departments.

Thank you for your time,

Jason Gawencki