

Testimony from Brenda Kelley
In Support of HB 5408
An Act Concerning The Presentation of A Carry Permit
March 3, 2016

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Good Afternoon: Co-Chairpersons, Senator Larson & Representative Dargan; Vice Chairs, Senator Coleman, (my State Senator), and Representative Verrengia; and members of the Public Safety & Security Committee. My name is Brenda Kelley and I live in Windsor, CT. In 2012 I retired from the position of State Director of AARP CT so I have advocated before the legislature many times in the past. But I have never testified on gun legislation or before the Public Safety & Security Committee.

I am testifying in Support of HB 5408, a bill that would require the holder of a permit for the carrying of any pistol or revolver to present such a permit upon request of a law enforcement office. I was greatly alarmed when I learned that, unless there is reasonable suspicion of a crime, a police officer on the scene is not allowed to ask to see the gun permit of the person and to insure that the permit is valid.

I drive a car and we all know that anyone's car can become a deadly weapon. Because of that, all of our cars have to have a publicly displayed license plate. That license plate alone gives law enforcement a lot of information. Using just that number, an officer can determine if I am driving an unregistered car, a stolen vehicle and more. And if an individual sees a car driving too fast & erratically they can call 911 and, not just report the incident, but give the car's license plate number to help expedite an investigation. And they expect that their call will be handled immediately. Should the investigation of a 911 complaint lead to law enforcement pulling over the driver they will have to provide the vehicle registration, their driver's license and their insurance documentation. If they don't have an up to date registration their car can be impounded and towed. If they have committed a crime they can be issued a ticket or arrested on site.

A gun is a deadly weapon too! And given recent incidents in CT, other states and throughout the world a gun is potentially far more deadly than a car. Gun owners in CT have to have a permit to carry a gun but gun owners do not have to publicly display this permit. I am not advocating that they have should have to do this. But if an officer approaches them to check their permit I believe they should provide it just like we all have to do if our car is pulled over by law enforcement. This is not unreasonable.

This is especially true given the times in which we are living with an increasing number of people fearing that a random shooter or a terrorist could appear almost anywhere they might be. Fear and anger are at a level I have never seen in my lifetime as is actual terrorism and gun violence. And more and more people are purchasing & carrying guns out of fear that they may need then to protect themselves and their families. Plus more and more serious and fatal incidents are happening.

The gun owners I knew growing up had guns because they liked to hunt or target shoot or because they were in law enforcement, the military or other security jobs. Up until recently, I don't recall ever being concerned about this. Now anyone could legally (or illegally) be carrying a weapon in a concealed or open fashion in a store, restaurant or even my church. And it is possible that one or more of these people might be a real threat to me or to others.

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Federal Homeland Security has a major national campaign under way telling citizens “If You See Something, Say Something” and telling us how to do this. Should I ever report, I would expect that it be investigated. And if it could pose an immediate threat, I would expect that it should be investigated immediately.

I want to share a personal story that led me to even pay attention to HB 5408 in the first place. In early January I was vacationing out of state with a friend who used to live in CT, but now lives in Georgia. She had recently driven to Texas with her husband to visit their son. She told me that on two occasions her husband experienced a road rage incident from someone carry a firearm openly. They were terrified! She also shared that her son was increasingly feelings threatened because of the large increase in the number of people openly carrying firearms in Texas. She asked me if I was experiencing the same thing in CT. I said no, I had never seen anyone openly carrying a gun in CT and I believed we had one of the strongest gun laws in the Nation. But I quickly did a Google Search and discovered she was right. CT General Statutes do not prescribe any method of carrying a gun, either concealed or otherwise.

We both were on vacation so we didn't spend much time discussing gun laws beyond this initial conversation. I did google California, where we were vacationing, and learned that open carry of hand guns is not permitted. So both of us relaxed and enjoyed our time together.

The day I was flying back to CT, January 18, 2016, there was an incident in Bridgeport where a man standing in a Subway restaurant openly carrying a gun was stopped and asked by a Bridgeport Police Department officer for his gun permit. The gun owner resisted providing this because he didn't believe he was required to do this because of CT law. I learned about this several days later when I was catching up on CT news. Remembering the earlier conversation with my friend, I went to the CT Post website where I saw a long video of this incident between the gun owner and the Bridgeport police filmed by the gun owner. I found it disturbing (as did everyone I eventually shared it with) not because the police were harassing the gun owner but because the gun owner was resisting showing his permit in what I and others considered a very harassing way.

I then explored websites on “open carry” issues. I discovered that a national website, www.opencarry.org was strongly urging gun owners to open carry in compliance with the laws in the state where they were living. Their motto, “A Right Unexercised is a Right Lost”. I discovered through other research that open carry is legal in most states. But the differences between these state laws was mind boggling to me. I frequently travel between states and it would be impossible for me to know if what I might witness was legal or not.

I also discovered Connecticut Carry (www.connecticutcarry.com). On their site I found a lot of good information on the background for HB 5408, recent incidents, & their perspective on open carry. I appreciated their link to the CT State Police's Training Bulletin 2013-01 called “Considerations Regarding the Carrying of Hand Guns and Other Firearms” and the 2/5/2016 clarification from the Chief State's Attorney, “Open-Carry” Enforcement of General Statutes 29-35 (b) as Amended in 2015.

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That helped me realize that HB 7027 in the January 2015 Session was where Sec. 2 of section 29-35 of the CT general statutes was repealed and the language now being debated in HB 5408 was substituted. I also noticed that only 3 people testified on this bill. None of them testified on this part of the proposed legislation that later became law. Other than gun advocates & a few public officials and legislators, I doubt that anyone in CT even knew about this change. I also noticed that that this change took effect in October, 2015 or only about 5 months ago! So it is no wonder that CT law enforcement through-out CT might be confused as well as citizens like me who have never seen anyone even open carry a hand gun in CT! I find the current situation to be like a “very bad accident waiting to happen”!

That is why I strongly support HB 5408 that would require the holder of a permit for the carrying of any pistol or revolver to present such a permit upon request of a law enforcement office. This is a common sense solution that would alleviate tension between the officer, the permit holder, and the public who may either report seeing someone with a gun and/or witness the encounter. And it may even prevent this escalating to a very dangerous, even deadly, incident.

Thank you. I look forward to the Public Safety & Security Committee supporting HB 5408 and working to ensure that this is adopted by the General Assembly & signed by Governor Malloy.

Brenda Kelley