

Marty Isaac, President of the Board, Connecticut Against Gun Violence. Trumbull CT

My name is Marty Isaac and I am President of the Board of Connecticut Against Gun Violence.

I am here today to speak in favor of BILL HB 5408 which authorizes police to require persons openly carrying handguns in public to produce their permit. Right now, police can only ask to see permits IF there is reasonable suspicion of a crime.

Here's the problem with the current law. Lives are endangered if police have to wait.

A recent case in Colorado in 2015 illustrates the point:

A 33-year-old man, Noah Harpham, was walking down a public street in Colorado Springs, with an open carry firearm. Naomi Bettis, a neighbor to Mr. Harpham, called 911. No action was taken. The 911 dispatcher explained to Ms. Bettis that Colorado allows the public handling of firearms. Noah Harpham went on to kill three people.

It's a challenging situation to manage the rights of the Gun Owner and the Public when Open Carry is permitted in society. When police see an armed person in public, how should they know if it is an emergency, or not? As stated by a spokeswoman for the local Sheriff's Office in Colorado Springs: "Is this person exercising their rights or about to start a very serious situation in which someone is going to be killed?" "We just don't know the difference."

That is why the "reasonable suspicion of a crime" standard, in my opinion, doesn't adequately protect the public. Police are hesitant to ask to see permits because they are not sure how to apply the standard. We need to remove this ambiguity.

If we don't act, what we are really stating is that anyone, anywhere can walk around with a firearm, with the knowledge and comfort that police will not approach them – because "We just don't know the difference"

That can't be the policy that this esteemed body wants to promote.

Let's also be clear about one other point – carrying a firearm without a permit is a felony. It is a serious crime that should be enforced, but can't be, if the officer can't ask to see the permit.

In summary, let me close with this. Today's discussion is not about the right to Open Carry. Open Carry in Connecticut is the law of the land. The discussion today is whether Police should have the right to require persons openly carrying firearms in public to produce their permit.

On behalf of CT Against Gun Violence and our 50,000 plus supporters, Please support Bill HB 5408.