March 11, 2019

Distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

I respectfully submit the following testimony in support of:

H.B. 7218 ("An Act Concerning the Safe Storage of Firearms in the Home"),
H.B. 7223 ("An Act Concerning the Safe Storage of Firearms in Vehicles"), and
S.B. 60 ("An Act Concerning the Presentation of a Carry Permit").

H.B. 7218 and H.B. 7223 are pretty incremental and straightforward expansions of safe storage requirements. They address dangers to children and raise the (currently extremely low) bar for what it means to be a "responsible gun owner."

A successful application of stricter safe storage laws could have prevented the tragic death of Ethan Song a year ago. No child should have to pay the price for an adult’s carelessness, and if gun owners want to continue to take a cavalier stance toward firearm storage, they should at least do so knowing that they will face serious legal consequences if their choice leads to injury or death.

For reference: In Canada, firearms must be “not readily accessible to ammunition” unless they are stored in a locked compartment (or, in the case of all handguns, in a gun safe). In the UK, local police will not even issue a firearms license unless they can confirm that the applicant has a secure gun cabinet to keep it in. Sensible storage law is just one of the reasons why both countries see far fewer gun murders and suicides per capita than the United States.

S.B. 60 is a response to a pretty simple question: Do handgun permits mean anything in the state of Connecticut?

Right now, the answer is “not really,” because police can’t ask someone to produce a permit even when they’ve been called by a member of the public who observed the person openly carrying, or when they themselves have personally observed the person openly carrying.

The consequences have played out in Connecticut already: people have been intimidated, business has suffered, and police resources have been tied up in endless, escalating back-and-forth confrontations in Hartford, Bridgeport, Killingly, Hamden, Stamford, and elsewhere.

There are also more serious safety implications to a status quo where police are unable to do anything in response to a call about someone openly carrying. In Colorado Springs in 2015, when a woman called to report a suspicious man carrying a rifle, a pistol, and what
looked to be gas cans, she was told – and this is a direct quote from the 911 operator – “Well it is an open carry state, so he can have a weapon with him or walking around with it.”

Ten minutes later, the man carrying the guns shot three people dead on the street. He then engaged in a shootout with police, and was killed.

**This is what happens when gun toting is normalized, and the police have their hands tied.** They know that if they arrive, even if the situation does look suspicious and neighbors are being made to feel unsafe, their options are extremely limited.

Last time this bill was brought up, there was some pushback from members of the Committee about the possibility that this change to the law would give police further leeway for profiling. Frankly, if someone is walking the streets of New Haven or any other city in Connecticut openly sporting a handgun, I think the first concern of the members of this committee should be for public safety. Profiling concerns in any police interaction are real, but should be identified with the data reporting that is already mandated and addressed by the appropriate oversight bodies.

**Bottom line:** If police receive a complaint or report about someone carrying a handgun, they need to be able to act.

Thank you for giving your earnest attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

Ethan Rodriguez-Torrent
New Haven, CT