

March 9, 2019

**Testimony to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary in support of House Bill 7219, *An Act Concerning Ghost Guns*.**

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Rebinbas and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary:

My name is Jonathan Perloe. I am a resident of Greenwich employed by CT Against Gun Violence as its Director of Programs and Communications. I am here today to testify in support of House Bill 7219, *An Act Concerning Ghost Guns*.

Connecticut regulates firearms because doing so saves lives. In particular, we require background checks for every gun purchase to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people. And, by federal law firearms sold in Connecticut must carry serial numbers so that guns recovered in criminal investigations can be traced back to the original purchaser. Tracing firearms is a critical tool for investigating and solving crimes involving firearms, but is powerless in the absence of a serial number. In 2017 the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives conducted more than 408,000 traces.<sup>1</sup>

A key component of any firearm is the “frame,” also known as the “receiver” or “lower receiver.” Under federal law, only the receiver of a firearm must carry a serial number.<sup>2</sup> Aside from a fully assembled firearm, the receiver is the only component that is independently considered a firearm and subject to firearms regulation, including a criminal background check when purchased.

However, by selling unfinished receivers in a kit that can be assembled at home with a minimum of effort, irresponsible companies have found a loophole to avoid state and federal gun regulations. An unfinished receiver—without some holes, slots, and cavities—is not considered a firearm, it’s just a piece of metal that isn’t regulated.

Because these self-assembled guns don’t carry serial numbers, they are known as “ghost guns.” The same is true of 3D printed plastic guns that carry the additional risk of not being identifiable by metal detectors, such as the ones used in the State Capitol to keep legislators and the public safe.

The intent of H.B. 7219 is to regulate these “do-it-yourself” guns the same as fully functional firearms bought at a federally licensed gun dealer. There is no rationale for not regulating guns that are made from unfinished receivers or by 3D printers the same as we do other manufactured firearms. We cannot let prohibited individuals evade background checks by making guns at home and we cannot let untraceable guns flow into the black market to end up in the hands of criminals.

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<sup>1</sup> ATF By the Numbers, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Jun 14, 2018

<sup>2</sup> Ghost Guns, Giffords Law Center website

Opponents of the ghost gun bill considered last year claimed the law would turn individuals into felons for just owning a block of metal. It's not true. The bill language specifically talks about a component "designed and intended to be used in the 'assembly' of a functional firearm."<sup>3</sup> No one is going to jail for using a block of metal as a paperweight.

The danger of ghost guns and their threat to public safety is very real. Ghost guns have been used in mass shootings, in attacks on law enforcement and have been seized in criminal investigations, including in Connecticut.

Ghost guns are as lethal as manufactured firearms purchased from firearms dealers. Investigating a 2017 California shooting, NBC News purchased a ghost gun kit and gave it to a retired ATF technical expert. NBC reported, "Vasquez said it took him just a couple hours to assemble the weapon and when he tried it out at the gun range it 'work(ed) great.'"<sup>4</sup> Online seller GhostGuns.com advertises that its AR15 unfinished lower receiver will "give you an unregistered weapon system that's ready for almost any combat scenario."

Ghost guns have been used in multiple shootings across the country. In 2013 a California man, previously prevented by a background check from purchasing a gun, used an assault-style rifle he made from parts purchased over the Internet to kill five people.<sup>5</sup> In 2016 a Baltimore man used a homemade AR15-style assault weapon to shoot at four police officers.<sup>6</sup> In 2017 a California man prohibited from possessing firearms made high-powered rifles and in a shooting spree killed four and injured 10, including seven children at school.<sup>7</sup> Last year an 18-year old student was arrested near Philadelphia with a handgun he assembled and 1,600 rounds of ammunition purchased online. He was caught because he told a classmate he intended to go on a shooting spree at their school.<sup>8</sup>

Some may ask, is this really a problem? How many of these ghost guns are there? Because they carry no serial numbers, no one, not even the ATF, knows. But following California's 2016 law requiring owners of ghost guns to apply for serial numbers, its Department of Justice expected as many as 75,000 ghost guns to be registered by the beginning of 2019.<sup>9</sup>

Putting the lie to the charge that gun laws don't work, an agent heading the Los Angeles office of the ATF said, "Criminals are making their own weapons

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<sup>3</sup> An Act Concerning Ghost Guns, CT General Assembly, January 2019

<sup>4</sup> California mass shooter made his own rifles, NBC News, Nov 16, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Santa Monica Shooter Built His Gun From Parts He Bought Online, Huffington Post, Aug 5, 2013

<sup>6</sup> The Rise of Untraceable 'Ghost Guns', Wall Street Journal, Jan 4, 2018

<sup>7</sup> The Rise of Untraceable 'Ghost Guns', Wall Street Journal, Jan 4, 2018

<sup>8</sup> Police: Exchange student charged in high school threat built gun from parts bought online, ABC 7 News, Apr 2, 2018

<sup>9</sup> Officials across the country fear a new era of untraceable firearms, NBC News, Aug 1, 2018

because they're not able to buy them legally."<sup>10</sup> In a 2016 report on gun trafficking, the U.S. Government Accountability Office wrote "recent seizures of firearms parts, firearms made with unmarked parts, and equipment used to assemble or manufacture firearms...suggest an emerging reliance by criminal organizations on this source of weapons."<sup>11</sup>

Now ghost guns are turning up regularly in Connecticut and neighboring states.

In November 2018 a Willimantic teen was arrested for selling multiple Glock pistol and AR15-style ghost guns, telling an undercover agent that demand was so high, he couldn't keep up.<sup>12</sup> In 2018, police confiscated seven ghost guns from the streets of Bridgeport.<sup>13</sup> In January 2019 a Southington man was convicted in connection with selling a ghost gun on armslist.com, advertising it as "No serial. Completed from 80 lower. No paperwork."<sup>14</sup>

Just last month, and just 50 miles from Danbury, an Ulster County, New York man was arrested for allegedly assembling dozens of guns at his home and selling them to members of outlaw motorcycle groups and convicted criminals.<sup>15</sup>

When New York State Attorney General Eric Schneidermann announced a 32-count criminal indictment of two Long Island men he remarked, "Ghost guns represent a new, dangerous frontier of illegal firearm trafficking—the creation of homemade, completely untraceable, military-grade firearms."<sup>16</sup>

Connecticut needs to respond to this very real threat to public safety by treating firearms made at home the same as we do those bought from licensed gun dealers. That's why I urge you to vote House Bill 7219 favorably out of this committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jonathan Perloe  
Director, Programs and Communications  
CT Against Gun Violence

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<sup>10</sup> Officials across the country fear a new era of untraceable firearms, [NBC News](#), Aug 1, 2018

<sup>11</sup> Firearms Trafficking, [U.S Government Accountability Office](#), Jan 2016

<sup>12</sup> 'Ghost' gun seller appears in court, [Republican-American](#), Nov 27, 2018

<sup>13</sup> Bridgeport ordinance bans ghost, 3D-printed guns, [CT Post](#), Nov 8, 2018

<sup>14</sup> Southington man who tried to sell homemade rifle online sentenced to 18 months, [myrecordjournal.com](#), Jan 28, 2019

<sup>15</sup> NYC DEP officer from Ulster manufactured assault rifles, [Poughkeepsie Journal](#), Mar 2, 2019

<sup>16</sup> A.G. Schneiderman Announces Thirty-Two Count Indictment Of Two Defendants Charged With Illegally Trafficking Untraceable 'Ghost Guns', [Press Release](#), Sep 21, 2015