

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

My name is Kerstin Rao, I am from Westport, where I am a homeowner as well as a middle school teacher at Bedford Middle School. Each day, I am charged with protecting my students as well as educating them.

I am writing to testify 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*, H.B. 7219, *An Act Concerning Ghost Guns* and S.B. 60 *An Act Concerning the Presentation of a Carry Permit*.

For thirty years I have been a teacher, and my students are the reason I love what I do. But in recent years, I've noticed an increase in student anxiety, and an ongoing level of student concern over the possibility of gun violence in their school.

Each time we have a mandatory lockdown drill, I know some students' minds are going to an even darker, more worried place. They read the news. They see the inaction by our nation's lawmakers. And they feel more alone.

I reassure them that Connecticut has the strongest gun control laws of our nation's states, but some ask me, 'What about ghost guns?' Like I said, they read the news. And for that I have no reassuring answer.

Just over one year ago, we had a student threaten to shoot a specific teacher at Staples High School, which is right next to our building. Staples went into a form of lockdown called 'shelter in place' - none of us at Bedford were given a reason why, and we were not put on any form of lockdown. This was strange and not a customary procedure. Then Staples was evacuated and dismissed early. Definitely not customary.

That afternoon, our Superintendent, along with our Police Chief, gave a press conference. A young man was questioned at Staples and taken into custody for making a shooting threat against a teacher. While he was unarmed at the moment, the police investigated the teen's home and "determined that he had thoughts of committing a mass shooting at Staples and that there was a cache of guns similar to ones used in school massacres in his home." (Hartford Courant, March 20, 2018.)

The police noted that the guns were secured as according to the law at the time, and that the parents complied with police fully. The young man was sent to a hospital for evaluation.

This hit home for all of us teachers, for parents, and, most especially, for students.

I became a far more vocal advocate to prevent gun violence. I attended the March for Our Lives in Hartford that year, and joined Everytown for Gun Safety.

I've got family members who are responsible gun owners, and I respect folks who share that value system, but that alone is not enough to truly protect our children and all citizens. That's like expecting people to voluntarily wear seat belts. If you are of my age, you remember all kinds of people who rebelled against that 'overstepping' of government bounds – and a few of them wound up dead from injuries sustained in car accidents which could have been prevented by – you guessed it – wearing their seat belt.

There are currently loopholes in the law that make it very hard to prosecute offenders, as happened in the case of Ethan Song, a 15 year-old in Guilford who was visiting a friend, got hold of an unsecured gun, and was killed. The way the laws are written currently made it possible to argue that there was no way of proving the gun was loaded when he found it, and the father of Ethan's friend was not held accountable.

I've already provided written testimony a few months ago when Connecticut examined how to write laws to regulate ghost guns. What on earth could possibly be acceptable about a kit you can order online that has all the parts of a gun, directions to put it together, and no serial number and therefore no need to register it? This is the direct opposite of responsible gun ownership and should raise the fury of any legislator worth their salt.

Requiring folks who are carrying a gun in the open in public makes common sense. Responsible gun owners, like my own family members, apply for permits to go hunting, and have to have them ready to show game wardens when they are in the woods. The same common sense should be applied to folks openly carrying guns in public.

Thank you for serving the State of Connecticut, and thank you for reading my testimony today.

I strongly support H.B. 7218, H.B. 7219 and S.B. 60 and urge you to favorably vote these bills out of the Judiciary Committee.

Sincerely,

Kerstin Rao

Westport, CT