Dear Senator Formica, Representative McCarty, and Members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee,

I am writing you to express my steadfast opposition to HB 5040. Please consider my included testimony below while deliberating this bill.

The Numbers Seem Misleading

The source of the data supporting the September 2019 congressional report claims the cost of gun violence to Connecticut is $1.2 billion per year, with cost being defined as “lost income and spending, employer costs, police and criminal justice responses and health care treatment.” Connecticut is a relatively wealthy state, with higher cost of living and wages than many other states. As a result, the criteria used for this report skew the total cost of gun violence to appear higher. The overall cost for expenses considered to be in the interest of the public and therefore subject to public funding, including police, criminal justice, and health care treatment, are not clearly delineated in this report. As a result, I believe the total cost to the tax payer is inflated.

Furthermore, this report indicates that Connecticut has one of the lowest overall rates of gun violence in the country, with the overall suicide rate and gun death rate less than half of the national average. In fact, the overall cost per resident is lower for Connecticut than 45 other states, yet none of these states are debating such a drastic taxation measure on ammunition. What trend exists in Connecticut that would indicate that this excise tax is required? When comparing ‘cost’ related to GDP per state, Connecticut’s impact is four times less than the national average...only two other states are less impacted. Shouldn’t we be spending our time and money on other issues first, like education or investing in transportation improvements? After all, more people died on Connecticut roads in 2018 than by gun violence.

The report also indicates that over 60% of gun deaths in Connecticut are related to suicide, but does not identify the costs related to suicides vice the commitment of a violent crime. It has been publicized that the intent of this bill is to raise revenue to fund programs that reduce gun violence, but so far only programs that are related to violent crime have been identified. If this is the case, why would 100% of this new potential revenue be devoted to less than 40% of the issue? Furthermore, the bill does not define which groups may withdraw funds from the revenue account. What entity would oversee the efficacy of the programs funded by this new revenue? How can we ensure that groups or entities withdrawing these funds are executing their intended purpose without bias, especially towards the 2nd Amendment?

Revenue Won’t Occur Due to Road Trip Economics

Simply put, Connecticut is a small state surrounded by many other states. Given the prospect of saving 35% on ammunition purchases, in my opinion many citizens will simply travel to neighboring states to purchase ammunition. If this persists, I would imagine that actual revenue generated would fall far short
of the $7 million predicted. Tax revenue theory indicates that the most assured way of raising revenue is to distribute the burden across that entire tax base. If gun violence prevention is set as a priority for public health of the state, then the funding for this should be shared by everyone in the state and not among a few.

**Reduction in Firearm Proficiency**

The classic phrase of ‘practice makes perfect’ comes to mind. If the cost of ammunition is increased, the likelihood of law-abiding citizens to practice safe usage of their firearms in the effort of improving and retaining marksmanship is diminished. This would affect all users of firearms including hunters, competitive shooters, and those who may have to resort to using their firearm for protection.

With less practice, hunters have less experience planning and executing a safe and ethical shot, competitive shooters may curtail their training regimen and reduce their competitiveness, and if lethal force is required to protect oneself or others…the ability to a gun owner to respond to threat in an appropriate manner may be impaired. In the case of self-defense, when the decision to use a firearm can happen in a manner of seconds, muscle memory and training are essential to the ability to protect oneself or others, while also ensuring that innocent bystanders are not affected. This excise tax would burden the wallets of lawful citizens and impair their ability to hunt, compete, and protect.

I hope you will consider these points and support lawful gun owners in Connecticut by opposing this bill.

Regards,

Ben Fontneau

Waterford