February 26, 2020

Dear Chairs Fonfara and Rojas and the members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee:

My name is Sarah Raskin and I live in West Hartford. I am writing to support H.B. No. 5040: AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN EXCISE TAX ON AMMUNITION

I applaud Representative Gilchrest and all of you for considering creative ways to raise revenue. Like other excise taxes, such as those on cigarettes or alcohol, this is an excellent way to fund needed gun violence prevention programs. The cost to those who use guns is minimal and, of course, gun use is optional.

I serve on the Board of Directors of Connecticut Against Gun Violence and have had the pleasure of working alongside Compass Youth Collaborative, Mothers United Against Violence, Hartford Communities That Care, and Helping Young People Evolve. All of these groups work each and every day on the streets to reduce gun violence. Compass provides school-based programs and youth re-engagement, Mothers United provides comfort in the immediate aftermath of a shooting, Hartford Communities That Care provides youth leadership training, and Helping Young People Evolve provides opportunities for community engagement in the most disenfranchised communities in Hartford. Other groups target even younger children like Hartford’s Proud and Young, Educated and Determined to Succeed. I know you will hear from representatives of some of these groups at the public hearing. But all of these groups are severely underfunded. And yet they are there, day in and day out, making a difference. Their potential is limitless but they are not always to reach those goals due to lack of resources in the face of the massive gun violence epidemic.

One painful example is Project Longevity. Although it has been shown to be one effective evidence-based program in other states and has had success in Hartford, funding was gutted and personnel had to be let go. Project Longevity has recently received more funding again but it is always tenuous and dependent on budgets, this excise tax would be able to provide a more dependable revenue stream.

The cost of gun violence is staggering not just in dollars, at something like $1.2 billion each year, but more importantly in human life. In an average year 179 people die in CT each year (including an average of 12 children and teens), and that does not include those injured. Moreover, it does not include those who witness gun violence, including children. An average of 18 women are fatally shot by an intimate partner in Connecticut each year (many of these were “law abiding gun owners” right until they killed their partner). An excise tax would be an excellent way to begin to chip away at this cost by funding necessary prevention programs.

I am a clinical neuropsychologist and a professor of neuroscience and psychology at Trinity College. I am well aware of the long term effects of exposure to violence on developing
children. The only real way to support our youth is prevention. There are prevention programs that we know can work. Let’s adopt this simple model for providing them with funding.

Sincerely,

Sarah A. Raskin, PhD, ABPP
Charles A. Dana Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience
Trinity College