Distinguished members of the Financial Committee:

My name is Richard Souza. I am from East Hartford. I am testifying today, February 27, 2020, in opposition to:

H.B. No. 5040 An Act Establishing An Excise Tax On Ammunition

Proficiency with firearms is a perishable skill; either do it or lose it, and training has become very expensive. Years ago, when I was a Boy Scout, we bought military surplus .30-06 Garand rifle rounds for peanuts. But prices started to rise. In the 1990s, military surplus Garand rounds and 7.62 NATO rounds were 21 cents and 16 cents per round respectively. Today, they’re 75 cents and 60 cents, when you can find them. Initial training with a rifle requires thousands of rounds, and thousands of rounds are required yearly thereafter to retain skill. That translates into thousands of dollars per year. Increasing ammo costs has already decreased the amount of training we can afford to do. Additional taxes will decrease it even more. We who train this way do it out of a love for our country. We’ve seen what happens to civilians when their country is invaded. We do it to ensure that we will never be forced to watch an enemy bayonet our children before our eyes, and we also know that many do not want to accept this responsibility. That is their choice.

But the people I really worry about are the extremely poor. These are the people who live in really bad neighborhoods and who can barely afford to buy a firearm for protection and to pay all the fees associated with getting firearm permits in this state. How will they buy ammunition after you add this tax? And let’s be blunt here. A disproportionate number of these poor people who live in the inner cities are people of color. **Who but a racist would support such a tax?** The rich firearm owners of CT, who are mostly not people of color, won’t be affected by this tax. They have the means to pay it. But for the poor, the cost of one box of ammunition could literally make the difference between their families surviving a home invasion, or not.

As for the majority of middle class gun owners, who comprise the largest population of gun owners in CT, I think it’s a safe bet that if you pass this bill, they will not buy another box of ammunition in this state. They will go to NH, VT, ME or PA with the money that they earned in CT jobs and pay cash to buy ammunition in bulk in these other states. They’ll plan vacations in states that don’t have these draconian laws. They’ll buy a year’s worth of ammunition at a time, and with the sales taxes that those other states collect, those states will be better able to balance their budgets, while here in CT, you won’t even be collecting the taxes that you were getting before this onerous legislation. You think I’m wrong? Do you remember what happened when you doubled the fees for camping in state parks or when you doubled the fees for hunting in CT? What happened to your revenue streams then?
Gun stores in other states will start placing advertisements in the Hartford Courant, much the same way that MA liquor stores do now. Then, of course, there are the stores that will have to close here because of reduced ammunition sales and the people who will be unemployed as a result of this tax. I think that’s called unintended consequences, and it’s not a new thing in Connecticut.

Be prepared to see the revenue stream you are presently getting on ammunition sales dry up once this bill becomes law.