TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO H.B. 5040 AN ACT ESTABLISHING AN EXCISE TAX ON AMMUNITION

Senators and Representatives:

I respectfully submit the following testimony in opposition to the aforementioned bill.

My name is John G. Sturmer, Jr and I am resident of Austin, Texas. I left Connecticut in May of 2019 after living in CT since August of 1994. I’m not going to pretend that guns and gun rights were the primary reason I left, nor am I going to try and convince this committee that I was tired of “paying taxes”. John Adams wrote in the preamble to our own Declaration of Independence that “…all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed”. That was true of Connecticut, that was true of those 13 colonies, and it is largely true that to sell the home I lived in, raised my children in, really became a “grown-up” in, and move 2000 miles away to a place where I had no attachments, no friends, no family, and frankly no home is neither a decision made lightly nor for trivial reasons. Truly, my decision to leave was a difficult one that comprised many things. It seems to me that there was over-arching theme over every reason I had to go; it seems as though, in the close to 25 years I spent in Connecticut, there is another scheme to stop lawful gun ownership, or separate me from my money every single year. Congratulations – this bill accomplishes both.

Quite recently, Connecticut underwent a bitter and divisive debate over tolls. Although I wasn’t “active” in that movement, I did follow it quite closely. All of the people I had interacted with had some things in common, not only that we did not want tolls, but we universally agree that Connecticut’s transportation infrastructure is in dire need of repair, and above all, we had zero confidence that this money would be spent on infrastructure; rather, we universally agreed that we fully expected the toll receipts would find their way into the fiscal abyss known as the “General Fund” and that in 5 years’ time this government would once again be knocking at our door with its hand out asking “please sir may I have some more”. Enough is enough. The government of this state has a long history, at least in my time there, of over promising and under delivering. This tax is no different.

Full disclosure I am an avid shooter, gun owner, enthusiast, armorer, and instructor, so clearly I object to this bill on 2nd Amendment and Article 1st sec 15 grounds, but my appeal today is to those of you that desire to use this revenue as stated in the bill “to fund anti-gun organizations”. Do you honestly believe that would happen? When has that actually happened? This state government has a long and distinguished history of raising revenue, for a stated purpose, and failing to deliver. Gov. Weicker swore in 1991 that we “needed” an income tax to put us on stable fiscal footing. We have deficits year after year after year. Gov. Malloy’s record tax increases were supposed to plug our deficits. what was the result? More record tax increases… and more deficits. More specifically, the automobile sales tax and two gas taxes were supposed to fund the “Special Transportation Fund”, yet Gov. Lamont and Democrats insist that we need tolls to fix the roads. Last year we passed a Constitutional amendment preventing STF money from being “swept” to the general fund … this was easily thwarted by deciding simply not to fully fund the STF. Clearly roads were not a priority, tolls were. What about cigarette taxes and that large tobacco company settlement? Where were the stop smoking commercials? Where are the billboards? Where are the free nicotine patches and gums? Oh yeah – that money went into the general fund too. What about “still revolutionary”? Part of the governor’s 2012-13 budget was an
advertising campaign to boost tourism. Not only did it fail, in six months’ time it was determined that the general fund needed the revenue... because deficit... as expected. Are seeing a pattern here? Believe me, if you want to help anti-gun organizations, this is not the way.

Of course, those arguments only hold water if you are exceptionally anti-gun and looking to end civilian gun ownership in this state. Some of you may be looking at this from a revenue point of view. Ok. Will it benefit the states coffers to put hundreds of gun shops and ranges out of business? That is most certainly what will happen. Ammo sales drive these businesses. Very few gun owners can afford (or have the space) to buy a new gun every few weeks. Of course there are more people hoping to prevent that very thing, as they do in California with limits on firearm purchases. If ammo is unaffordable, which undoubtedly the goal of this bill, you can scratch those business off the list too. If we can't afford ammo, how will we patronize shooting ranges? Will your answer be the same as the Democrats was when Aetna moved its corporate headquarters out of Connecticut? “It’s only 50 jobs”, right? Or maybe, if revenue is your goal you think “people will get used to it”. They won’t. Most likely they will drive to other states to buy their ammo. Most likely they will ALSO leave with ½ a tank of gas and fill up in another state. Are you going to be like New York and send revenue agents to gun shops in other states to write down license plates?

Finally, as a trainer I have heard many calls for required training. Though I don’t believe it should be required, it should certainly be encouraged. Do you want a bunch of people walking around the state with a gun they haven’t picked up in 2 years? I find it unfathomable that anyone who is truly interested in preventing the second largest cause of gun deaths, and the single largest cause of gun injuries, accidental shootings, wouldn’t want people to practice, train, and remain proficient with their firearms. My suggestion would be to remove any tax on ammunition, training and shooting ranges.

To summarize, I’m opposing this legislation for the following reasons:

I have zero confidence that the money will be used for its intended purpose, whether I agree with that purpose or not.

I have zero confidence that it will have ANY impact on people that should not have guns (or ammo).

I have zero confidence that it will do anything to improve Connecticut’s deplorable financial condition.

The only impact of this law will be to drive yet more small businesses out of business, curtail civilian gun ownership, stop lawful gun owners from remaining safe and proficient with their guns, and put even more money into the States general fund to be squandered.

I urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to defeat this legislation quickly, and move on to trying to fix the myriad of other problems that Connecticut has.

Respectfully Submitted

John G Sturmer Jr.