

## PUBLIC TESTIMONY TO GUN VIOLENCE COMMITTEE

### Introduction

I am Gregg Pompei, a private citizen from Bristol. I am not a gun owner. However, as a law-abiding citizen, I believe it should remain my right to become one if I should decide to do so.

### Exercise Restraint in Use of Mental Illness to Bar Gun Ownership

I want to address the issue of using a diagnosis of mental illness as a basis for restricting a person's right to own guns. When a person is stigmatized for seeking treatment for a condition people with that condition are more reluctant to seek treatment. Treatment may alleviate the condition. Until April 2010 the Federal Aviation Administration summarily prohibited any pilot taking antidepressants from flying. The result was that many pilots who suffered from depression did not seek treatment, instead choosing to conceal their condition. In April 2010 the FAA changed this, and pilots taking antidepressants are now evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

So ironically, someone not diagnosed with a mental illness could be more dangerous than a person who has been diagnosed with one – because the person who has not been diagnosed has *untreated* mental illness. Therefore, a denial of a person's ability to own firearms based on a purported mental illness should be done only when there is objective, professional, and compelling indication that the person likely poses real danger to himself or others. A person who has been diagnosed but is being properly treated may well be less of a risk to society than one who eschews treatment and conceals his illness. I should emphasize that a nuanced or unusual personality should not trigger such restriction — a person who has acne, is reclusive, or likes to play a lot of video games and is otherwise a law-abiding person should not be considered mentally ill. When considering the taking of any rights or freedoms from someone based on the person's history of mental illness please do so carefully and on a case-by-case basis so as to not stifle the seeking of treatment.

### Possibility of Armed Victim Deters Assailants

On a second point, I believe that the prospect that a victim may possess a gun acts as a deterrent to criminals. Regrettably, some crime surely will still occur, but I believe that some would-be burglars and home invaders are deterred by the fact that they may end up getting their head blown off by their victims. Others who do choose to go through with their nefarious plans will be stopped and possibly permanently incapacitated when an armed victim defends himself.

This is only possible if the attackers don't know where guns are and aren't. Therefore, please don't consider making the names and addresses of gun owners public.

I don't believe that laws restricting or barring ownership of firearms or magazines will keep these items out of criminals' hands.

### Removing Motivations for Violence

Regrettably, it is impossible to completely stop someone who has previously done nothing wrong but flips and becomes bent on causing damage. We can't punish people who have done nothing wrong. People who commit these crimes generally feel they're getting a raw deal from society. I would like to see more effort to offer resources to people who may have drifted to the fringes of society and help improve the odds that a person in whom such anger may be brewing can be restored to feeling like a valued member of society.

Unfortunately, people sometimes use things in inappropriate and criminal ways. There's nothing physically preventing any of us in this room from taking our cars and running people down on a crowded sidewalk; the reason we don't is we don't want to. Through supportive families, friends, teachers, and counselors we need to try to keep our kids from wanting to do these horrific things – and from wanting to do so when they become adults.

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We also should find a way to take away the reward these people get, which is the recognition they achieve. Their videos and manifestos are published. This is what they wanted! We now have the phenomenon of mass murderers now trying to outdo the prior ones in number and heinousness in order to still stand out. We should limit the divulgence of their life histories, manifestos, and videos to investigators; to the rest of the public, their views should be relegated to insignificance and obscurity.

### **People Should Be Able to Defend Themselves**

Should someone "lose it" and attempt to engage in a murderous rampage people should be able to have the tools to swiftly and decisively defend themselves.

Thank you senators and representatives.

Gregg Pompei, private citizen  
Bristol, Connecticut