

Honorable Committee Members:

Some may claim that opponents to added gun control measures simply haven't been exposed to the horror of gun violence. I testify as a one who was a student in the building during a school shooting that left a teacher and two students dead, another student critically injured, dozens emotionally scarred, and an emotional spiral for some that ended up taking more lives. I testify as a surviving family member of a beloved one lost to gun suicide. And still I ask you to exercise the utmost restraint when considering SB 554 and all similar measures. I know very well the horrors you would like to be able to prevent, yet I believe the net effect of the proposed legislative steps would be more harmful than helpful.

I can't overstate the value, in terms of number of lives or quality of life, that comes from a routinely reinforced sense of respect-- respect for present day neighbors, for our forebears, for those who will come after us, and respect for the truth. The foundation for much of the peace and health in the world is trust. The radical approach to mutual respect, mutual trust, and mutual accountability set out in the US Constitution has undisputably advanced mankind far beyond what the founders and their contemporaries personally lived. The founders and their product have been the targets of aggressive malignment, some of which is due, but the fact remains that the greatest achievements of progress we value stand on the shoulders of the founders and the wisdom of the mutual respect, trust, and accountability to which they committed our system of self-government. Inextricable from this is the restraint of government. The commitment that government and the people corporate will suffer the rights of the individual is not simply a pleasant idea. It is a keystone of the arrangement.

The restraint from infringing on free speech and free assembly rights were not made in ignorance that people would occasionally abuse these rights, but in full knowledge and careful weighing of the costs. Similarly, the founders would not be surprised that the limitations on search and seizure and limitations on compelling self-incrimination are often a barrier to law enforcement. In the same way, and likely more so, the right to keep and bear arms was not recognized unwittingly. The fact that it is sometimes abused to horrifying effect doesn't indicate that the promise of government restraint was made in error. Quite the opposite. That's the whole point of the bill of rights-- to affirm that these individual and state rights will likely be a burden to the larger group AND YET they are to be respected and preserved.

Over 200 years in force, each of these enumerated rights is a bellwether for the health of our mutual respect and accountability. Each time a "common sense" bill is brought forth to address the "crisis" on accessibility of weapons, it is an assault on both the people and the government. What we need is consistent affirmation of our commitment to the fundamental nature of our relationship so that we can build on it. Instead of trying to bail out and fall back to an arrangement of brute force, let's move forward in the exercise of self-restraint and self-discipline. Yes, some will break that trust, but it is far better to establish trust that may be broken and deal decisively with the breaking, than to erode the trust and forego all its fruits.