

Testimony of Ava Gustin
Volunteer with Students Demand Action for Gun Sense in America
January 23, 2024, 9:00 AM

Good morning Chairman Carpenter, Committee members and staff. Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony today.

My name is Ava Gustin and I attend Mission Valley High School as a junior. I have lived in Kansas my entire life and enjoy being around animals and nature in the rural area that I reside in. Even though I go to a smaller school, I have experienced the horrible effects of gun violence in America. The fear I have felt when going to school or hearing a loud bang in public should not occur to anyone. Unfortunately, the reality is it can happen to anyone.

I am testifying today because HCR 5020 is a dangerous resolution that poses a direct threat to Kansas public safety laws that protect our communities by keeping guns out of the hands of people who we all agree shouldn't have them.

I am against this resolution for many reasons. One of my biggest concerns is mental health. When people are in deep depression and spiraling, any weapon around them poses a significant threat to their health. There are no more rational thoughts, just the intent to harm. If guns are readily available, they can utilize firearms in ways that they normally wouldn't. With this bill, it allows guns to be in the hands of more people, which could increase suicide rates. Think of the people that could be harmed by the passage of this bill. Are the lives of those in a time of struggle worth less than the right to a gun?

According to Everytown Research of 750 cities, cities in states with the strongest gun prevention laws have half the rate of people who die by gun suicide as those in states with the weakest laws.

It seems that looser gun laws affect children the most. They are ones going to school and being in harm's way or causing unintentional shootings. This is a big concern for me. The thought of a child incidentally shooting and killing their siblings or themselves breaks my heart. No child should ever have to bear the guilt of that situation. These deaths are preventable, if we choose to do something. Instead of saving ourselves and others the hurt of closing little coffins, we choose to listen to the gun lobby.

According to Everytown Research, rates of unintentional shootings by children were 34 percent lower with laws that hold gun owners accountable when they do access an unsecured gun, compared to states without such laws.

Even though this bill seems like it will not have an effect on children and families, it will. They are the people that face the harm of the gun lobby and will bear the weight of this decision. It is up to you today to have the integrity of preventing so many tears and sadness or giving in and allowing children to die. You may feel that eliminating gun possession for convicted felons and domestic abusers does not connect to children but it does. They live in homes of all different situations and backgrounds.

This bill poses several significant concerns:

If adopted, strict scrutiny would threaten to eliminate Kansas's most crucial public safety laws, including:

- **Prohibition on Gun Possession by Convicted Felons:** After strict scrutiny amendments passed in Louisiana and Missouri, convicted felons challenged state laws that prohibit felons from possessing firearms. At least one lower court found that Louisiana's law prohibiting felons from having guns was unconstitutional. Fortunately, the Louisiana Supreme Court reversed this ruling.
- **Prohibitions on Gun Possession by Domestic Abusers:** In Louisiana, after strict scrutiny passed, a convicted domestic abuser challenged the constitutionality of a state law prohibiting possession of a firearm by people convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence crimes.

Strict scrutiny laws make state taxpayers fund the flow of lawsuits brought by criminal defendants.

- The Missouri State Auditor determined that Louisiana's strict scrutiny law led to "significant time, effort, and expenditures by Louisiana's public defenders and district attorney's offices," imposing "significant workload and related costs on the Louisiana government." The auditor projected that a strict scrutiny law in Missouri **would ultimately cost Missouri taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.**

I encourage members of the committee to vote **NO** on House **Resolution 5020**.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.