

4129 + 4130

Testimony on House Bills 4127 and 4128 to House Elections Committee from Katie O'Sullivan See, Greater Lansing Area Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense, February 28, 2023

Good morning, Chairperson Tsernoglou and members of the Elections Committee. My name is Katie See. I am a registered voter in Williamston Township, a mother, a grandmother, and a member of Michigan Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense, serving as the Co-Lead for the Lansing Group. I am also a Professor Emerita from James Madison College at Michigan State University where I taught in the field of Social Relations and Policy for more than three decades. I thought the committee would benefit from hearing from someone who has dedicated her adult life to teaching college students about the importance of and obstacles to full and equal participation in our democratic processes.

4129 + 4130

I am here to speak in support of House Bills 4127 and 4128. These bills safeguard access to voting and election security, the bedrock of American democracy. We know from the long history of violent suppression of the voting rights of African American and other voters of color that there is no meaningful right to vote without the right to vote safely. The security of voters, poll workers, and those engaged in counting ballots is paramount to ensuring exercise of the rights to vote and the election process. Weapons in polling places threaten that security. Their mere presence can be intimidating in any place, but even more so in places which are fraught with tension in our divided polity. In Michigan, we have seen troubling harassment of, threats to, and fear among our election workers and poll watchers.

To allow people to carry firearms in a polling place is a threat to public safety and security which can make any voters feel threatened. Think about our youngest voters: All of us here today have witnessed a generation of young citizens who have been exposed to the prospect of gun violence in places where they expect to be safe; many have been directly traumatized by gun violence: those from Oxford High and MSU are suffering the repercussions of a mass shooting; youth in Lansing, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint and Saginaw endure frequent threats from gun violence in the streets and outside of schools. We should do all we can to safeguard these young Michiganders, to promote their civic engagement and political participation, to reinforce their voting rights and to secure their safety in polling places...not to retraumatize them by the threat of guns where they are voting.

There is no doubt that our legislature has the constitutional right to prohibit gun possession in polling places. In last year's Bruen decision, the broadest interpretation of the Second Amendment ever adopted by the Supreme Court, Justice Clarence Thomas, writing for the plurality, affirmed that our legislatures have the constitutional right to prohibit gun possession in sensitive places. He explicitly named polling places as a location where the government retains the ability to restrict gun possession (along with schools, government buildings, legislative assemblies and courthouses). Even the state of Texas, with the most expansive promotion of gun rights in the country, prohibits guns in polling places. They recognize that the mere presence of firearms in a polling place is an intimidating reality in today's world. It is time for Michigan recognize this reality as well.

Because we want to maximize citizen participation in our polity and because we are deeply committed to preventing any forms of voter intimidation, for the future of our democracy, on behalf of myself, and Michigan Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense, I strongly urge passage of these bills.