

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

House Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Hearing on Community Responses to Gun Violence in Our Cities

Prepared Testimony of Congressman Wm. Lacy Clay
September 26, 2019

Thank you to Chairwoman Bass and Ranking Member Ratcliffe for allowing me to testify. I appreciate the Subcommittee's efforts to organize and hold a hearing on this important topic.

This nation and the community that I represent in St. Louis are facing a public health emergency. And I am not just speaking about the tragic frequency of mass shootings in schools and other public spaces.

Members of this Committee and the 116th Congress have had numerous opportunities to make it known how they prioritize firearm safety. Regardless of what any of my colleagues have said publicly about the issue, this body has a responsibility and an opportunity to work together and move the debate forward.

The nearly 40,000¹ people killed by firearms in the United States in 2017 no longer have that chance. The people living and working in my district where nearly 600² shootings have occurred so far this year do not have the choice to remain silent while these issues impact their daily lives. I do not have that choice.

Since May, at least 22 children under 16 years of age have been killed by guns in the St. Louis region³-- some due to random shootings, others due to accidents and unsecured handguns. It is due to statistics like this that black families are 62 percent more likely to lose a son to a bullet than to a car

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Health Statistics, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/injury.htm>. 23 Sep 2019.

² Gun Violence Archives, <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/congress/mo/>. 23 Sep 2019

³ ABC News, "Gun deaths of St. Louis children rise to 22 as 3-year-old shoots self in head", <https://abcnews.go.com/US/gun-deaths-st-louis-children-rises-22-year/story?id=65592890> 22 Sep 2019.

accident.⁴ My community is already on track to top last year's rate of gun related injuries and deaths and I know we are not alone.

Our city councils and other local leaders used to be able to confront these issues directly. Mayors and law enforcement would work with other community leaders and residents to discuss ways to make our streets safer. Unfortunately, beginning in the 1980s the gun lobby started approaching governors, state legislators, and even some of my colleagues in Congress to make sure that these dedicated local leaders and first responders would not be able to do what they need to do to address firearm safety.

This is unacceptable.

That is why I, along with my esteemed colleague and friend, Congresswoman Robin Kelly, introduced legislation to restore the ability of these local leaders to pass common sense laws and regulations. Our new legislation is directed to help curb the slow-motion mass shootings that occur in St. Louis, in Chicago, and other urban communities, every week.

H.R. 3435, the Local Public Health and Safety Protection Act would allow the Department of Justice to provide grants to States that reverse their ill-advised firearm pre-emption laws and allow local governments to take reasonable measures to address gun violence on their streets.

Under the bill, States should not prohibit or restrict a local government from:

- Requiring background checks for firearms purchases;
- Restricting the ability to carry a firearm in public places;
- Restricting the quantity and type of ammunition that an individual is allowed to purchase;
- Requiring gun owners to safely store their firearms, especially in households with children;
- And prohibiting the sale and transfer of certain types of especially deadly firearms and accessories, including: Semi-automatic assault weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines, among other provisions.

⁴ Giffords, "Urban Gun Violence," <https://giffords.org/issue/urban-gun-violence/> 23 Sep 2019.

The epidemic of gun violence in places like St. Louis and Chicago is different from the situations in smaller cities and towns across Missouri and across the country. Not every community faces the same challenges—that is why this bill works. Communities who do not experience high rates of gun violence would likely not see the need to implement higher standards at the local level. However, the impact on other communities would be meaningful.

The Local Public Health and Safety Protection Act is all about hope—the hope that we can finally give local governments the freedom to protect innocent citizens and first responders while make our neighborhoods safer...regardless of what the state legislature thinks.

As of today, H.R.3435 is supported by the major national advocacy organizations, including: Giffords, Everytown for Gun Safety, Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, March for Our Lives, Brady, Newtown Action Alliance, Survivors Empowered, States United to Prevent Gun Violence, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and Amnesty International USA.

In addition, it has received vocal support from other leaders in the St. Louis area, including emergency personnel, Mayor Lyda Krewson, the St. Louis Board of Alderman, and countless other individuals focused on ending gun violence in our community.

We all know that there is not one fix that will end all gun violence—especially without attention to other factors, including: poverty, education, and whole health. But that is not an excuse for our inaction. Congress has the power to save American live and we must do it—now. Passing H.R. 3435 would be a powerful, innovative first step that I urge you to support.