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Testimony in Opposition to HB 2058 – Concealed Carry Reciprocity
House Fed & State Affairs Committee, Rep. John Barker, chair
January 27, 2021

Mr. Chair, members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Rabbi Moti Rieber, and I am executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multi-faith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” by educating, engaging and advocating on behalf of people of faith and the public regarding critical social and economic justice issues.

One of KIFA’s key issues is that of gun violence. The people of faith who make up KIFA support strong gun legislation that would address the pandemic of gun violence that besets our country. The pastors I work with hold this issue very closely, because they are the ones who have to sit with families after a suicide, after an accident, or after a shooting in a school, bar or parking lot.

We are beginning to see the results of Kansas’ 10-year experiment in doing away with all restrictions and licensing of handguns, and they are as we have predicted - more guns lead to more gun violence, more guns used in domestic abuse, and more suicides.

Between 2009 and 2018 (the last year for which statistics are available), the overall gun death rate in Kansas increased by 37%. In that time period, the firearm homicide rate increased 34% and the firearm suicide rate increased 40%¹. In particular, rural suicide rates are climbing quickly. The majority of people who die by suicide are men between the ages of 35 and 54, and people at risk particularly live in counties with more veterans, more gun shops and more people who are uninsured,² which is sounds like quite a lot of Kansas. Rural gun suicides is an underrecognized epidemic in our state and in our country.

Conceal carry reciprocity means that people who might not be eligible to conceal carry in Kansas will be able to if they are licensed in another state, including teenagers, and those convicted of stalking and some violent misdemeanors, who are allowed to carry loaded handguns in some other states but would not be under current Kansas law. Another state’s carelessness should not become Kansas’ problem.

Every denomination KIFA works with closely has made numerous public statements in support of what we call “gunsense” legislation. I could share a dozen such statements, but I will only share one, from the Presbyterian Church USA:

¹ <https://efsgv.org/state/kansas>

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/rural-suicide-rates-increase-america-studies-show-risk-not-randomly-ncna1060561>

It is clear that our voices have not been persuasive in themselves and our actions too limited to stem the tide of gun violence. There are too many places in America where it is difficult to hear [God's word] over the persistent retort of gunfire. We continue to be convinced that God calls us to protect the lives of all within the human community, as each is loved by our Creator. In order to be faithful to our vocation to seek God's shalom, we need to seek new and active ways of effectively bringing life-saving change. We can no longer tolerate such a preventable exile from God's peaceable kingdom or reign.

The endless loosening of gun restrictions is a failed experiment – one with deadly results. It's hard for me to believe that the gun lobby and its legislative champions can look at the results of this deadly experiment and think, we need more of that. But I hope the members of this committee will recognize that the time has come to address our gun violence epidemic, not to continue to expand it. Please vote no on HB 2058.

Thank you for your attention.