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Senate Judiciary Committee
Lansing, Michigan
Opposition to SB 442
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Guests.

I am honored to speak to you today as a representative of Physicians for the Prevention of Gun Violence (PPGV), a group of approximately 300 Michigan physicians who are working across the state to address the devastating epidemic of firearm violence that has affected our state and our country. As a psychiatrist, a public health advocate, and the mother of two school-aged children, I have a professional and personal interest in reducing the risks for firearm-related injuries and ensuring the safety of our children. I am confident that none us here want to experience another Columbine, Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, Umpqua, or any shooting – high profile or otherwise - ever again.

PPGV strongly opposes Senate Bill 442. This bill, if passed, will threaten the health and safety of countless men, women and children in our state by making it easier to bring guns into sensitive areas such as schools, hospitals, bars, and places of worship. This is a dangerous bill that should never become law.

Gun violence in America is a public health crisis. With over 30,000 deaths and twice that many injuries per year attributable to gun violence ("Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence – Gun Law Information Experts," 2015) we cannot ignore this national emergency. We must address this problem immediately, and to do so we must use a public health approach. One of the fundamental components of public health is *prevention.* We seek to reduce and eliminate risk before illness, injury or tragedy strikes. In my remarks today, I will demonstrate that guns in our environment, particularly in areas such as those addressed in SB 442 represent an unacceptable risk, and the only logical way to promote health and safety is to reduce – not increase - exposure to firearms.

Firearms have no place in our schools where they may become easily available to children if left unsecured. Prior research demonstrates that one third of homes with children contain firearms and that in over 40% of these homes, firearms are not stored safely (Schuster et all, 2000). Since we know that unsafe storage of firearms in the home is common, we have no reason to expect that guns would be safety stored in schools. Let me remind you of the Macomb County assistant prosecutor - a CPL holder – who in March of this year absentmindedly left his jacket in the gymnasium of his son's elementary school. Concealed within the jacket was a handgun. Thankfully in this instance nobody was harmed (Burns, 2015). However, this situation could easily have ended tragically. Consider the following statistics:

- 50% of all fatal firearm accidents among children occurred after a child found and began playing with an unsecured firearm (NVDRS 2010).
- 25% of children as young as 3-4 years old are strong enough to pull the trigger on a firearm that they find while playing (Naureckas, Galanter, Naureckas, Donovan, & Christoffel, 1995).
- Among high school youth - suicide is the third leading cause of death (CDC, 2010). We know that adolescents can frequently act on impulse, a potentially lethal scenario when coupled with access to unsecured firearms.

With these facts in mind, how many of us here would feel comfortable if our children had access to unsecured firearms at school?

Proponents of SB 442 will tell you that the presence of firearms will prevent injury by allowing teachers and adults to act defensively in the face of a threat. However in a 2015 study, Hemenway & Solnick showed that firearms were used in less than 1% of violent crimes as a defensive weapon, and

among events where a firearm was used defensively there was no evidence that they decreased the risk of injury to the victim. *Why, then, if the increased presence of firearms doesn't actually confer a benefit would we allow them onto our school campuses particularly when the risks of injury are well established?*

Proponents of SB 442 will tell you that expanding right to carry laws leads to reduced crime. This argument is based on a deeply flawed study from 1997, but unfortunately, is still widely cited. The National Research Council has discredited the conclusions from this study and subsequent research has actually suggested that expanding right to carry laws may be associated with an increase, rather than a decrease, in some crimes (Anaja, Donohue, & Zhang, 2012). *Why, then, if credible research fails to demonstrate any benefit to the expansion of right to carry laws would we ever consider making it easier to carry guns into our schools, our hospitals and our places of worship?*

Proponents of SB 442 will maintain that only properly licensed and trained CPL holders will be allowed to carry firearms in these sensitive areas – as if that should provide us reassurance. Let me remind you of the minimal training that is required of CPL holders in the state of Michigan (Michigan State Police, 2014):

- New CPL applicants only need 8 hours of training, and only 3 of those need be on a firing range.
- The CPL is valid for 5 years. No continuing education or training is required during this period.
- To renew a CPL an applicant need only certify that he has *reviewed* three hours worth of safety training and spent ONE hour on a firing range in the preceding 6 months.

This very low level of training should give us significant pause as we consider the challenges a CPL holder might face in an active shooter situation. To quote Harvard researcher David Hemenway:

> Police officers, who receive large amounts of training, are still often inadequately prepared to handle ambiguous but potentially dangerous situations. Intense stress, confusion, and fear are inherent in most possible shooting situations. Heart rates skyrocket, and it is difficult to think clearly and to act deliberately (Diaz 2001a). Not surprisingly, even police make serious mistakes. Individuals without training are likely to do much worse. (Hemenway, 2004, p. 70)

Are we to seriously believe that ordinary citizens with limited practical experience are capable of mounting an effective response in an active shooter scenario?

Finally, Proponents of SB 442 argue that allowing for concealed carry rather than open carry is a valid solution to the "open carry loophole" because it will eliminate the disruption and fear that open carry creates. I submit to you that out of sight does not equal out of mind. More importantly, out of sight does not equal out of danger! A concealed threat is no less dangerous than one that is visible. Guns, openly carried or concealed have no place in schools, hospitals, bars, houses of worship, or in any of the other areas impacted by this bill.

In closing, I am confident that I speak for all of us here today when I say we all wish for peace and safety throughout our state, our country, and our world. Where we disagree sharply is how to achieve that goal. While proponents of SB 442 may believe that they have the right to carry firearms in virtually all locations at all times, I want you to carefully consider the evidence I have presented today that clearly illustrates why this practice is dangerous. When we decrease exposure to hazards, we decrease the likelihood of harm. It is incumbent upon us to minimize risk in order to maximize health and safety. We must keep firearms out of schools and all of the other sensitive areas impacted by SB 442. Our children's lives depend on it.

Thank you.

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