

Restaurant Carry Bill Testimony - Ohio Senate

By: Nikki Goeser

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My name is Nikki Goeser. I am here to support the passage of Ohio's Restaurant Carry Bill.

I am one woman who truly understands the right to self defense and the importance of this bill becoming law. I am here to tell you my personal story of tragedy, in hopes you will see the importance of this bill also.

My life is forever changed because our Second Amendment was not upheld and our Constitution was ignored by some of our lawmakers in the State that I call home, Tennessee. There are things that no one should see...and I have seen them.

On April 2, 2009 my husband Benjamin Felix Goeser was shot multiple times & killed at Jonny's Sports Bar right before my own eyes, by a man who had been stalking me. My husband & I ran a karaoke business together out of Jonny's one night every week, and this man who was stalking me was one of my karaoke customers when I ran shows in other establishments downtown months prior. For whatever reason, this man became fixated & fascinated with me. He started coming on to me and I had to tell him he was being inappropriate & I was happily married.

Little did I know, this was an answer he would not accept. There was no restraining order filed because this man never threatened me. Here's how I feel about restraining orders...they are worth about as much as the piece of paper they are written on. People walk right through them - especially people like my stalker.

To my knowledge he never followed me anywhere other than he came to my karaoke shows, where I believed he was just a dedicated customer (before his fascination with me was evident). His method of stalking was very well thought out. When this man showed up at Jonny's it concerned me because I had never seen him at that establishment for my shows before, and Ben had asked him to please leave me alone a month prior. This establishment was 40 minutes away from where I ran other shows, so what is he doing here? We hadn't seen this guy in a solid month. Something was wrong and I knew at that very moment that what I thought was a dedicated customer in the previous months was actually a stalker.

I asked management to remove him and when they confronted him and asked him to leave, he pulled a .45 caliber handgun and murdered Ben in front of me and 50 other patrons. That man was eventually tackled by a United States Marine that happened to be in the crowd and held until police came. I have learned from the detectives working my case that this incredibly evil individual did not have a criminal record. He did not even have as much as a parking ticket in his history. He also did not have a handgun carry permit. I however, did.

That night at Jonny's, I left my loaded "permitted" handgun locked in my vehicle just outside the front door because Tennessee State Law at the time told me that I could not carry my "legal" weapon in an establishment that serves alcohol. My gun could have saved my husband's life that horrible night. At the time, I was trained beyond what is required to carry a handgun for personal defense. Since my husband's death, I have taken it upon myself to get some of the best training Tennessee has to offer a civilian. It is something I take very seriously.

Since Ben's death I have made it my mission to educate people on the importance of our Second Amendment Rights. The Founders of our great Country saw that people who wish to do us harm would not be so successful if we as a citizenry were armed. It is a "right" to self defense, not a privilege.

I do not blame the gun that was used to kill my husband; I blame the person behind the gun. A gun cannot pull its own trigger. I hear people say..."but guns are made specifically to kill." My answer to that is, yes a gun can kill, but in the correct hands, a gun can be used to save innocent lives.

Think of all the places where innocent people have been shot to death by criminals. Places such as Schools, Churches, Military Bases, Restaurants that serve alcohol, all places where guns were not allowed. Gun free zones are killing zones. The predators choose these places because they are easy targets. There is no one there who can defend themselves. Inevitably, many people die before "help" arrives. That help comes in the form of someone with...guess what...a Gun.

Almost all active shooter situations are ended by a good guy with a gun. Limiting where you can carry is not the answer. I hope what I say to you today will open your eyes and perhaps give you a glimpse into my reality.

Owning a gun is a huge responsibility that right to carry permit holders understand & respect. Less than 1% of any gun crimes are ever done by a handgun carry permit holder. Less than 1%! If guns cause crime then my guns are defective.

All that you are doing by voting FOR the Restaurant Carry Bill is allowing those citizens like me, to carry their "legal" weapon for their own self defense into these establishments that happen to also serve alcohol. A family should be able to eat at an O'Charley's, Ruby Tuesday, TGI Friday's and be protected. If a business owner does not wish to have "legal" guns in their establishment, they can simply post a sign saying so. Permit holders will honor that sign (just as I did) but criminals could care less and will carry anyway, just as they do now and have always done. Laws mean nothing to murderers.

For those of you who are concerned about guns & alcohol being in the same place...Similar carry laws are already in forty other states within the U.S. This law is working in these states and none of the states have repealed this law since it was put in place. Then why the huge concern here in Ohio? You CANNOT drink or be under the influence of alcohol and be in possession of your firearm under the Restaurant Carry Bill. Guns & Alcohol do not mix, and they won't mix by law abiding citizens. The only person that would mix them and hurt or kill someone is a person that would do it anyway, regardless of a law.

Believe me, right to carry permit holders don't want to lose that permit. The "Law" drew an invisible line for me at Jonny's Sports Bar's front door. It is a Law that I understood as foolish, but because I was scared of prison and losing my permit if caught, I left it in my car and now I stand before you as a 34 year-old widow.

Ben & I had dreams together. I wanted to be a mother. We had already purchased a baby crib and started making plans with our Doctor to start a family. Now those dreams are shattered. My life is completely altered. I leave work every night and go to a lonely, dark, quiet house that once was a home full of light and laughter. This is my reality. I pray something this horrific never happens to you or someone you love. The pain is just about unbearable.

It is better to have trained, law-abiding citizens present that can stop a tragedy such as what Ben & I went through. Self Defense is not Vigilante behavior. You are not out looking for the bad guy to punish them, the bad guy comes to you and you simply want to survive. I can tell you that when seconds count, the police ARE minutes away. They will get there in just enough time to put up the crime scene tape and take pictures of your loved one. It is impossible for the Police to be anywhere and everywhere at anytime.

Focus on the criminals and not those of us who have spent the valuable time & money to be trained and act responsibly. There was nothing to prevent that "animal" from coming into that Restaurant and murdering my precious husband. The Law did not stop him. But it sure stopped me from stopping my husband's death.

I want you for one moment to imagine sitting in a restaurant with someone you love dearly and then imagine someone pulling a gun out of their jacket. You are completely helpless to stop what you see is coming. Then they shoot your loved one in the head right in front of you. They don't just shoot once, they basically unload that weapon into your loved one. Ben was shot not just once, but again, and again and again and again and again. I pray you don't wait until this sort of thing happens to one of your loved ones before you decide to do something about it.