

## **Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence Statement Opposing SJR 1**

Senators Zaun, Bisignano, Schultz:

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) represents 22 crime victim service provider agencies across Iowa and the collective experience of agency staff who dedicate their lives to supporting victims of violent crime, specifically survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Our direct service providers routinely witness the pain and suffering of crime victims, as well as their stunning resilience in surviving repeated violent acts (often over the course of months and years), inflicted on their minds and bodies by people they know and care about.

ICADV urges you to oppose SJR 1, a constitutional amendment adding gun rights to the Iowa Constitution with a 'strict scrutiny' judicial review standard. We believe this amendment undermines every existing or future sensible gun safety policy. America's level of gun violence threatens public safety, and we urge legislators to halt further efforts to advance this constitutional amendment proposal.

As we become normalized to the regular pace of mass shootings and gun homicides in our communities and come to grips with the reality that two-thirds of all gun deaths are gun suicides, discussion to further expand access to guns present a false choice. Access to guns and gun rights for law-abiding citizens are not threatened in Iowa. You can be in favor of gun rights AND be in favor of reasonable policies to protect people from gun violence.

Strict scrutiny is the most demanding judicial standard applied to constitutional cases. It requires judges to assume a challenged law is unconstitutional until the state proves otherwise. Only three states (Alabama, Louisiana, Missouri) include the extreme strict scrutiny language under consideration in Iowa. The experience in these states indicates a strict scrutiny standard undermines gun safety laws due to persistent legal challenges that burden the justice system and are paid for by taxpayers.

Gun deaths by suicide, by intimate partners in homes, and in criminal acts occurring every day in communities across America are most common but mass shootings offer powerful illustration of the terror and toll of gun violence. The link between guns and domestic abuse homicide is so definitive that the history of domestic abuse among individuals who carry out mass shootings is unsurprising.

More men than women are killed by gun violence, except when it comes to domestic violence incidents where women and children are significantly and disproportionately terrorized and killed when guns are present. Nearly half of female firearm homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner. Access to a gun makes it five times more likely that an abusive partner will kill his female victim and when that happens guns are the cause of death for 70% of bystanders killed in domestic abuse incidents.

And women in communities of color face a disproportionate share of the burden- nationally, Black women are twice as likely to be fatally shot by an intimate partner compared to white women and younger Black women between ages 18-34 are nearly three times more likely to be shot and killed by an intimate partner than are white women in same age group.

Importantly, for every case of domestic abuse homicide, there are many more cases where women and children are held hostage and terrorized with guns. For example, the abusive

partner who never fires the gun, but threatens a partner with it by pointing it at the children, waving it around during an argument, or shooting a family pet.

Experience and research offer numerous examples of policies that work to protect people from gun violence and overwhelming majorities of Americans support these policies. We are moving in the opposite direction in Iowa. As a modern society we balance individual rights with public safety and community interest all the time. In the face of overwhelming evidence confirming America's uniquely shameful gun violence problem, gun rights should be no exception.

The gun rights constitutional amendment proposal with strict scrutiny language advancing in Iowa would undermine all efforts to enact sensible restrictions on firearms access and could open the door for current gun safety laws to be challenged. Please oppose SJR 1.

*Senate Judiciary Subcommittee Statement; January 21, 2021*

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