



Waterbury Regional Chamber
driving business to business

Testimony of Lynn Ward, President & CEO
Waterbury Regional Chamber
Before the Judiciary Committee
Hartford, CT
March 20, 2023
Testifying in favor of:

HB 6834: An Act Concerning Serious Firearm Offenses by Repeat Offenders.

Good morning, Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein, and members of the Judiciary Committee. The Waterbury Regional Chamber, which serves 14 towns in the greater Waterbury region and represents the collective interests of 900 members in matters of public policy and economic development, **strongly supports HB 6834: An Act Concerning Serious Firearm Offenses by Repeat Offenders.**

In 2022, out of the 31 individuals arrested for both fatal and non-fatal shootings in Waterbury, 70% (or 21) of these felons were on sometime of pretrial release. Meaning these people were out on either parole, probation or literal pretrial release. These worrisome statistics are overwhelmingly committed by those already in the judicial system in almost every major city in Connecticut. Throughout our 932 chamber members, the threat of increased gun violence within the greater Waterbury area becomes more and more of a reality. We have all seen the increase in violent crimes over the past 3 years, not only in the city of Waterbury but also surrounding towns. Many business owners want nothing more than a safer environment for both their employees and the customers they serve daily. While our chamber understands this is an extremely difficult and divided political topic, we can all agree that something must be done in order to restore justice to our streets and continue attracting more potential customers along with potential new businesses. We support Mayor O'Leary and Chief Spagnola in their nonstop fight for the passing of House Bill 6834. The legislation would effectively decrease the number of violent criminals within our borders while also making it more difficult for those in a pretrial position to have the opportunity to repeat such heinous crimes against the innocent public.

This bill is setting the groundwork for an overall strategy to prevent and reduce community gun violence such as this. While Connecticut already has some of the strictest

gun laws in the country, there is always room to expand and enhance what our previously passed legislation does not address without infringing on our 2nd amendment rights.

In conclusion, 70% of people arrested in Waterbury for a fatal or nonfatal shooting were in the community on pre-trial release, probation, or parole. After seeing a major increase in crime right after the pandemic, legislation like this has never been more important in order to tackle one of the most alarming crime epidemics in recent history. On top of this, almost every major city in our state is seeing the correlation between felons guilty of violent gun crimes and the repetitive nature in which they commit shockingly similar crimes while on pretrial release where a firearm is once again involved. Our chamber stands behind our mayor and police chief in the attempt to reduce the repetition of these heinous crimes. Business owners already face enough obstacles when it comes to new taxes and other anti-business legislation, it's time for Waterbury to take a stand and continue to clean up our beautiful city.