



Colorado sheriffs rally at state capitol, testify against assault-weapons bill

Eighteen sheriffs, undersheriffs and commanders—representing Archuleta, Baca, Cheyenne, Custer, Douglas, El Paso, Fremont, Garfield, Gilpin, Larimer, Mesa, Morgan, Prowers, Rio Blanco, Teller and Weld counties—rallied at the state capitol last Wednesday to oppose [House Bill 23-1230](#), legislation to ban assault-style weapons. The bill was eventually voted down by the House Judiciary Committee after a multi-hour hearing that included testimony from several sheriffs.

Representatives from our sheriff agencies along with the County Sheriffs of Colorado team worked yesterday to educate lawmakers about our real-world experiences with public safety and addressing mental health concerns and how banning assault-style weapons in the hopes of preventing mass shootings will not get to the root problems that are causing these types of horrendous crimes in our state.

Several sheriffs provided testimony during the Judiciary Committee hearing and explained to lawmakers their concerns with the bill and how the legislature could more effectively help law enforcement keep their communities safe and prevent crime by focusing on mental health—and not on specific types of guns.

Relating to past experiences, Mesa County Sheriff Todd Rowell said that “over the past quarter of a century, my county has experienced five mass shootings that left families and loved ones devastated. Not a single one of those firearms used in those attacks qualified as an assault weapon under this bill. To the contrary, an attempted mass shooting in a small town in my county in 2017 was ended by a citizen who engaged the suspect with a firearm that would be banned under this bill. It should be noted that the firearm the suspect was using would not be banned under this bill.”

Rowell then turned his testimony to supporting mental health programs and increasing law enforcement presence within their communities. “I will stand beside you to support stronger mental health services,” Rowell told legislators. “In fact, my county is leading the way in addressing mental health and those experiencing crisis. I will support stronger sentences for violent criminals to keep them out of our communities. But I oppose passing a law that would have no effect on violent criminals and disarm law abiding residents.”

Garfield County Sheriff Lou Vallario also called on legislators to focus on prevention. “Let’s get ahead of this curve. Let’s get after these folks who have these issues and are bent on wanting to hurt members of society as opposed to a reactive approach,” Vallario said. “As sheriffs, we are fully invested in programs that will prevent people from coming to jail.”

Weld County Sheriff Steve Reams testified that this bill “does nothing to address the criminal element which will always find a way to inflict harm and it certainly does nothing to address the mental health crisis in this state.” Reams called on legislators to turn their “focus on to effective solutions for punishing criminal behavior and continuing to look for mental health solutions instead of passing a law that would make civilians less able to protect themselves from criminals and more reliant on law enforcement personnel which are harder and harder to recruit each day.”



Douglas County Sheriff Darren Weekly also noted that House Bill 23-1230, and similar bills in the past, have taken away rights of law-abiding Coloradans and missed the mark on addressing criminal behavior. Weekly pointed out in his testimony that guns are not blame, instead violence is “perpetrated by offenders who use a gun to commit horrific acts.” Noting past legislation, Weekly said this bill “would not help law enforcement stop mass shootings. ... We must attack these problems without compromising individual rights ... under the guise of safety.”

CSOC and our sheriffs will continue to educate lawmakers and the public about the importance of crime prevention and mental health support so that crimes like mass shootings and other violent acts that victimize Coloradans can be prevented.

CSOC would like to thank our members who take time to come to the capitol during the session, work with their legislators on bills impacting public safety, and keep their own communities updated about public safety issues at the state and local levels. Yesterday clearly demonstrated the commitment that Colorado’s sheriffs and their employees have in making our state and our communities safer places to live.