

## Father Of Sandy Hook Victim Urges Action On Gun Safety Bill

The father of a seven-year-old boy killed in a Connecticut school shooting a year ago urged a House panel Tuesday to require the use of gun safety equipment for gun owners who may have children in their homes.

Mark Barden, whose son Daniel died in the Sandy Hook attack, said the measure ([HB 31](#)) wouldn't impact responsible gun owners and won't take away Ohioans' ability to own guns.

The witness said he and his family continue to struggle with Daniel's death, telling the House State & Local Government Committee that the child was affectionate and compassionate beyond his years.

"It is impossible for me to explain to you what this feels like - to have your baby taken from you and to know that it was someone else's decision," he told the panel. "I'm here right now because unlike what happened to my family, you have the opportunity to prevent another family from living this indescribable pain."

After starting in September as the advocacy director for Sandy Hook Promise, Mr. Barden said he came across HB31 and sought to get involved in the process.

Mr. Barden said most gun owners are responsible, and take steps to secure guns in locations where children might be present. He said, however, gun safety is not prioritized in many locations.

"There are people who just don't understand the seriousness of this situation," he said. "House Bill 31 basically informs these folks that, this is the law, we have to be serious about protecting children."

He said even basic trigger locks and safes can help prevent similar events, noting that the equipment can be reliable and inexpensive.

[Rep. Matt Lundy](#) (D-Elyria) said critics have charged that requiring trigger locks and using other security measures can put people in danger if they face an attacker.

Mr. Barden said there are many safety mechanisms that provide quick access to a functioning weapon, whether it be a gun lock or a mounted gun safe.

He said the reality of the issue is that children are dying because some owners choose not to secure their weapons. He added that guns are one of the few potentially harmful consumer products that don't come with safety protections.

[Rep. Terry Boose](#) (R-Norwalk) asked how much the safety equipment can cost, and questioned whether locks can be used on multiple types of weapons.

Mr. Barton said the highest price he's seen for a fingerprint-based gun safe is \$325, with other types of equipment costing far less.

Mr. Boose said some gun owners might feel that accessing a trigger locked weapon could be a problem in a panic situation.

The witness also told Rep. Boose that he felt the bill would have prevented the Sandy Hook shooting because the weapon used in the shooting was unsecured.

[Rep. Bill Patmon](#) (D-Cleveland), the bill's sponsor, noted that gun owners who didn't expect that children would be in their homes wouldn't be impacted.

He told the panel a safety mechanism would be required for functional decorative weapons that are displayed in homes where children would be expected.

Mr. Patmon said the measure - and the testimony - should make members think about what is important. "There is nothing more important than our children," he said. "This bill, Mr. Chairman, it's a car seat. It protects our children."

Lauren O'Neill, Daniel's first cousin and godmother, also lent support. "Those of us who have had our worlds shattered by these tragedies now feel a responsibility to do everything we can to reduce gun violence," she said. "Though we will never be able to prevent every act of violence, we believe there are concrete measures that we can take as individuals and as a society that will truly make a difference."

"I know that the majority of gun owners are responsible individuals who are passionate about safety," Ms. O'Neill said. "I believe it is just as much in their interest to ensure that every gun owner upholds the same safety standards as it is for those who don't own guns."

Renuka Mayadev of Children's Defense Fund Ohio also offered brief testimony to answer questions members had asked previously.

Former Rep. Marian Harris urged the panel to support the bill. She noted that a schoolmate of her 18-year-old grandson recently committed suicide with an unsecured gun she obtained from her home. Ms. Harris said the suicide may have been prevented if the gun the young woman used was secured.