

**United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on the Constitution
Hearing Entitled: Stop Gun Violence: The Jackson-Elias Domestic Survivor Protection Act
May 18, 2022, 2:30 PM**

**Testimony of Holly Sullivan
Southbury, Connecticut**

Senator Blumenthal, Senator Cruz, and Members of the Subcommittee thank you for inviting me to this hearing titled Stop Gun Violence: The Jackson-Elias Domestic Survivor Protection Act.

My name is Holly Sullivan, and it is an honor to join you today. Thank you for your public service. I also strive to give back to my community and my country. I serve as a Selectman in my hometown of Southbury, Connecticut. In 2019 I was elected to serve as President of the Connecticut Citizens Defense League, a 43,000-member, non-partisan organization committed to upholding the inalienable rights of all citizens to keep and bear arms. I was re-elected to this role in 2021. I am privileged to join women across the country as a member of the DC Project, a nationwide organization of women committed to protecting the Second Amendment through education, not legislation, and serve on the Advisory Board. I am a working professional and hold a Master's degree in business and human resource management, a single parent, but most importantly, the mother of an incredible eight-year-old girl. Like countless women in America, I juggle many commitments every day.

I am here today to share my professional knowledge, personal experience, and the experiences of thousands of women across America. My testimony will challenge this proposal's intended impact and consequences and ensure this committee responsibly upholds its duty to the Constitution and the American people, especially women who are threatened by domestic violence.

I hope that this body will identify opportunities to empower women to prevent them from becoming victims, support programs that prevent violence, treat mental illness in all its stages, and ultimately heal broken hearts and broken homes across the nation.

Southbury is a town of 19,000 residents located directly between Newtown and Oxford, Connecticut. My community is no stranger to tragedies. There are altering days in life when you realize nothing will ever be the same. On December 14, 2012, I gathered with hundreds of people in Sandy Hook to leave stuffed animals, flowers, and candles for the 26 lives lost. I also vividly recall the day of the inexcusable murder of Lori Jackson in my neighboring town of Oxford. I was a young mother of a 7-month-old baby girl. I remember the sirens and waves of fear, calls of concern, and news that there was a manhunt underway. The search for her killer took six hours. It took me right back to 2012.

However, my path is a little different from some of the women you might expect to hear from on a bill like this intended to protect domestic violence victims. My perspective differs because I was raised with education in gun safety and firearm awareness. I did not fully appreciate the importance of this until I had something greater than myself to defend- my child.

In light of such tragic events, I am committed to having hard conversations and debating ideas and solutions to address gun safety, firearms awareness, and mental health. I do so because lives depend on it. It is hard to go against the popular narrative. I have been shunned from moms' groups, and I have received numerous angry, hateful, anonymous letters in the mail for speaking out for my rights and the rights of women and my right to defend my life and my child.

However, I cannot sit quietly knowing critical information needs to be shared, especially when bills like this will give citizens a false sense of security, especially if women are struggling to find security from their abusers.

We must balance providing victims of violent crimes with opportunities for peace and security while law-abiding gun owners retain their means of defense and due process rights. However, the bill before you today is not the solution. On behalf of more than the 43,000 people I represent in Connecticut and the women across the country who are members of the DC Project, I am here to testify to you today one absolute truth:

There is absolutely nothing in S. 2169 that would have prevented the murder of Lori Jackson.

Scott Gellatly, Lori's estranged husband, purchased his handgun in Virginia and transported it back to Connecticut. This act was prohibited by federal law. Gellatly purchased the handgun via a private transaction that did not include a National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) check and subsequent alert-- which is the linchpin of this proposed legislation.

As written, this bill does not, in any way, address the circumstances of the horrific killing of Lori Jackson. Women struggling with domestic violence must understand where this bill falls short in protecting them. You may wonder how I know with complete confidence that this bill will not result in the desired outcome. I have lived under this very law in my home state for five years.

Like much well-meaning legislation, this law, compounded with other onerous ones, has created unintended consequences in Connecticut. We now have three vehicles by which an individual can seek remedy in the face of a good-faith concern of violence or control. He or she can call the police to report a concern, they can file a risk warrant, or can petition for an ex parte restraining order. It is confusing, complicated, and costly.

In Connecticut and several other states across the country, gun owners are excluded from discussing how to remedy an issue-- one in which they are subject matter experts. Two-thirds of all fatality statistics related to “gun violence” are suicides. Nevertheless, in Connecticut, the very people who have access to firearms are generally not invited to participate in the forums to craft policy that directly impacts them. Recent legislation leaves the community of individuals with access to firearms uncomfortable seeking help for fear of false red flag complaints without meaningful penalty for perjury. In Connecticut and other states with similar laws, anyone can be subject to firearm confiscation without being charged with a crime and without due process.

Groups like Hold My Guns are doing outstanding lifesaving work. However, they are hindered by onerous firearm transfer laws, preventing the outcome that is most desired: safety and security. Connecticut’s gun laws are some of the strictest in the country, but they are far from the

gold standard we should aspire to as a nation. Connecticut's hyper-focus on gun restrictions often means that the legislature finds a solution in need of a problem as often as a problem in need of a solution.

Yet, more laws are passed before the last can be implemented and evaluated. Public Act 13-3 was the bill passed following Sandy Hook. It is described as a three-legged stool that touted a balance between gun control, school safety plans, and funding for mental health programs. Almost a decade later, only one of these initiatives that promised to protect our children was completed... gun control.

It is no surprise that Connecticut saw a surge of 40,000 new gun owners last year. Women are the fastest-growing demographic of gun owners in America and in Connecticut. African American women in Connecticut had the most significant increase in new permit issuance compared to any other demographic of applicants.

I am not here to tell you that every woman in America needs to carry a gun. I am here to tell you that no woman in America should be denied her ability to defend her life. How she is comfortable doing so is her personal choice.

I am also here to speak on behalf of women alive today because they exercised their right to defend themselves with a firearm. They have largely been missing from this discussion and are a vital resource to this committee and other women. As survivors of their tragic encounters, they live, breathe and walk among us because they were armed. There are no community gatherings

to celebrate their survival-- or even offers of thoughts and prayers. They are often vilified for being a gun owner in the first place. They are forgotten because they survived. Their firearm, training, and courage saved their lives. They were empowered to defend themselves, something we all should encourage.

Time and time again, these tragedies originate from a place of pain, hate, and intent to cause harm. Addressing those issues will have a much more significant impact than this bill, which would only provide a false sense of hope and create a national policy where we sacrifice the individual freedoms we hold dear. I urge you to back a non-partisan commitment to hold violent criminals truly accountable and offer meaningful remedies for victims in need. Above all else, the right to live is granted to us by our Creator, not our government.

Holly Sullivan is a single mother raising her 8-year-old daughter in Southbury, Connecticut.

Holly serves on the Advisory Board of the DC Project, a national organization of women for gun rights. Holly is one of the only women in the United States leading a state-level Second Amendment legislative action organization. The Connecticut Citizens Defense League is comprised of 43,000 members dedicated to protecting the unalienable rights of all Connecticut citizens to keep and bear arms.