From: Rep. Laddie Shaw
To: House State Affairs
Subject: FW: Oppose HB 61
Date: Tuesday, April 11, 2023 9:48:12 AM

From: Sally Rue <sarjesrue@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 10, 2023 8:24 PM
To: Rep. Laddie Shaw <Rep.Laddie.Shaw@akleg.gov>; Rep. Stanley Wright <Rep.Stanley.Wright@akleg.gov>; Rep. Ben Carpenter <Rep.Ben.Carpenter@akleg.gov>; Rep. Craig Johnson <Rep.Craig.Johnson@akleg.gov>; Rep. Jamie Allard <Rep.Jamie.Allard@akleg.gov>; Rep. Jennie Armstrong <Rep.Jennie.Armstrong@akleg.gov>; Rep. Andi Story <Rep.Andi.Story@akleg.gov>; House State Affairs <HouseState.Affairs@akleg.gov>
Subject: Oppose HB 61

Testimony on HB 61, House State Affairs Committee, April 11, 2023, 3 pm

Dear Chairman Shaw and Members of the House State Affairs Committee,

Thank you for scheduling this opportunity for public comment on HB 61, "An Act relating to restrictions on firearms and other weapons."

I am a 46-year resident of Alaska and a gun owner. I have serious concerns about HB 61 and its potential negative impact on the ability of the governor, state agencies and local governments to protect the public health, safety and welfare in the event of a declared disaster emergency.

By definition, times of emergency are unpredictable, chaotic, and full of stress and uncertainty. Communications are often disrupted. Keeping the public safe often requires fast and decisive action. State law gives officials broad powers that would not apply under ordinary circumstances for good reason.

Why would we want to arbitrarily limit the ability of the governor and state and municipal officials to respond to unique disaster emergencies in the most effective way to protect life and safety? Enacting a blanket prohibition on any kind of restrictions on possession and use of firearms and other weapons during a disaster second-guesses the frontline local and state officials who know best what is happening on the ground.

Although sponsors say this will not affect existing restrictions on carrying firearms in currently prohibited locations such as schools, hospitals, and shelters, I would like to see a specific clause added to that effect.

If this bill is enacted, what happens when an emergency shelter is set up in another location?

Will first responders and local emergency officials be prohibited from restricting a person from bringing in firearms and other weapons? Will families with children be sheltered with a lot of stressed out, exhausted people with loaded firearms and 'other weapons?' Can we expect that volunteers from the Red Cross and other organizations will feel safe volunteering in this environment?

My second major concern is in Sec. 44.99.510(c), providing for civil action by a person who thinks they have been adversely affected, or "a membership organization consisting of two or more individuals eligible under (1) of this section that is dedicated in whole or in part to the protection of the rights of persons who possess or use firearms or other weapons." Giving such a particularly described organization the status of a 'person' is troublesome at best. Allowing triple punitive damage awards will invite costly and likely specious lawsuits. At worst, this section will create confusion, and could have an extreme chilling effect on first responders, state and local emergency services officials, and volunteers trying to do their job of protecting the public under difficult circumstances.

I urge you to consider the real implications and unintended consequences of this bill in real disaster emergencies.

I urge you to oppose this bill as written, and address the substantial deficiencies that have come to light prior to moving it forward.

Thank you for reading my comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Rue
Juneau