

Nos. 25-238 & 25-566

IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

CUTBERTO VIRAMONTES, ET AL.,

Petitioners,

v.

COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS, ET AL.,

Respondents.

EDDIE GRANT, JR., ET AL.,

Petitioners,

v.

RONNELL HIGGINS, IN HIS OFFICIAL CAPACITY AS
COMMISSIONER OF THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF
EMERGENCY SERVICES AND PUBLIC PROTECTION, ET
AL.,

Respondents.

**On Writs of Certiorari to the
United States Courts of Appeals
for the Seventh and Second Circuits**

**BRIEF OF CONNECTICUT AGAINST GUN
VIOLENCE AS *AMICUS CURIAE*
IN SUPPORT OF RESPONDENTS**

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INTEREST OF *AMICUS CURIAE*¹

Amicus curiae Connecticut Against Gun Violence (“CAGV”) is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1993 in Fairfield County, Connecticut, after a five-year-old child was shot and killed in Bridgeport. After its founding, CAGV led the campaign that produced the State’s first assault weapons law. For more than thirty years, CAGV has worked to reduce gun violence in Connecticut through public education, grassroots organizing, and legislative advocacy.

CAGV’s work took on new urgency on December 14, 2012, when a gunman, armed with an assault weapon, murdered twenty first graders and six teachers and administrators at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown. In the weeks that followed, CAGV’s membership grew from roughly 35,000 to nearly 150,000, many of them parents. CAGV mobilized those members, together with local clergy and civic organizations, to demand that the Connecticut General Assembly take action. CAGV’s then-executive director took an active role in drafting proposed legislation concerning assault weapons, and CAGV supported the work of bipartisan legislators and law enforcement until that legislation, Public Act 13-3 (“the 2013 Act”), was signed into law.

CAGV submits this brief to provide the Court with an account, from the organization that led the effort resulting in Connecticut’s assault weapons law, of

¹ *Amicus curiae* states that this brief was not authored in whole or in part by counsel for any party, and that no person or entity other than *amicus curiae* or its counsel made a monetary contribution intended to fund the preparation or submission of this brief.

why and how the people of Connecticut and their elected representatives worked with such urgency and diligence to pass that critical law. That history shows that Connecticut's current assault weapons law, Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53-202a *et seq.* ("the Law"), is a bipartisan and constitutional response to as clear an example of an "unprecedented societal concern" as this Court is ever likely to see, *N.Y. State Rifle & Pistol Ass'n v. Bruen*, 597 U.S. 1, 27 (2022), and that the Law is consistent with the Second Amendment.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

At 9:35 A.M. on December 14, 2012, a twenty-year-old gunman shot his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. He carried a Bushmaster AR-15-style assault weapon, modeled on the military's M-16 design, with detachable magazines capable of holding thirty rounds, along with more than 300 rounds of ammunition. In less than five minutes, he fired 154 of those rounds and murdered twenty first graders and six educators. This unprecedented tragedy impacted not only the families—irrevocably shattered by its violence—but also thousands of parents and concerned citizens throughout the state of Connecticut.

Petitioners ask this Court to hold that the Second Amendment forbade Connecticut from doing what its citizens demanded: prohibiting weapons with unusually dangerous features from being sold in the State so an event like Sandy Hook can never happen again. That proposition is disturbing and wrong. Confronted with a danger whose full magnitude Sandy Hook laid bare, the Connecticut legislature made a deliberate judgment that specific features make a firearm unusually dangerous. Drawing lines on that basis is precisely what this Nation's tradition of firearms regulation has always permitted. CAGV writes to tell the Court how that law came to be.

For two decades before Sandy Hook, CAGV had warned that the State's 1993 assault weapons law left gaps that permitted the sale of firearms nearly identical to the ones it prohibited. After December 14, 2012, the people of Connecticut and their legislators

came to share that concern. Within days, residents were organizing in living rooms and church halls; within weeks, thousands were traveling to Hartford to testify and to march. Legislators of both parties negotiated through the winter. A bipartisan task force held hearings in Hartford and in Newtown itself; police chiefs from across the State testified in support; and the bill that emerged was debated, amended, and ultimately passed by wide bipartisan margins in both chambers. In short, the 2013 Act was the product of the ordinary democratic process working exactly as it should.

In 2013, the State legislated by feature and category, and the Law retains that structure today. As currently codified, for instance, the Law prohibits the most dangerous rifles by name and other semiautomatic, centerfire rifles based on their features, such as those that can accept a detachable magazine and have at least one of the following enumerated military-derived features: a folding or telescoping stock; a pistol grip, thumbhole stock, or other grip that allows a finger other than the trigger finger to sit below the action; a forward pistol grip; a flash suppressor; or a grenade or flare launcher. Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 53-202a(1)(B), (E)(i), 53-202c. Strip those features from the non-listed rifles, and those rifles remain lawful, as do the handguns, shotguns, and other firearms available to Connecticut's law-abiding residents. The Law thus "preserv[es] numerous legal alternatives for self-defense and other lawful purposes." *Nat'l Ass'n for Gun Rights v. Lamont*, 153 F.4th 213, 222 (2d Cir. 2025) (decided with *Grant v. Rovella*, No. 23-1344), *cert. granted sub nom. Grant v. Higgins*, No. 25-566 (U.S. June 30, 2026).

The Law is also consistent with this Court’s precedent. The Second Amendment right “is not unlimited,” *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570, 626 (2008). This Court has recognized a historical tradition of prohibiting the carrying of “dangerous or unusual weapons,” *United States v. Rahimi*, 602 U.S. 680, 697 (2024) (quoting 4 William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* 149 (1769)), a principle which has been held to “encompass[] those arms that legislators determined were unusually dangerous because of their characteristics,” *Lamont*, 153 F.4th at 233 (emphasis omitted). And this Court has held that, where a law regulating guns was passed to address an “unprecedented societal concern”—as the Law was, in responding to the horror of Sandy Hook—courts must take “a more nuanced approach” to the historical inquiry. *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 27. The Law readily satisfies that approach.

CAGV respectfully asks this Court to leave Connecticut’s judgment undisturbed and to affirm.

ARGUMENT

The Law restricts the sale and possession of certain firearms, so the Court will first ask whether “the Second Amendment’s plain text covers” the conduct the Law regulates. *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 17. If it does not, the inquiry ends. *Lamont*, 153 F.4th at 231. If it does, the burden shifts to the State to show that the Law “is consistent with the principles that underpin our regulatory tradition.” *Rahimi*, 602 U.S. at 692; see *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 24. That showing does not require “a historical *twin*,” only “a well-established and representative historical *analogue*.” *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 30. And where a law responds to “unprecedented

societal concerns or dramatic technological changes,” the Court takes “a more nuanced approach,” *id.* at 27, asking whether the modern law is “relevantly similar” to the laws our tradition permits, *Rahimi*, 602 U.S. at 692 (quoting *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 29). That inquiry turns on “how and why” the modern and historical laws burden the right of armed self-defense, and on whether those burdens are comparable and comparably justified. *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 29.

CAGV leaves the plain-text question and the full historical record to the parties and instead writes to address three issues. *First*, the murder of twenty first graders and six educators at Sandy Hook is exactly the kind of “unprecedented societal concern” that calls for a “more nuanced approach” to the history and tradition analysis. *See infra* Part I. *Second*, the Law grew directly out of that unprecedented societal concern. *See infra* Part II. *Third*, the Law fits comfortably within a “nuanced” view of the history and tradition of firearms regulation that this Court must consult. *See infra* Part III.

I. Sandy Hook Is The Paradigmatic Example Of An “Unprecedented Societal Concern”

To determine whether a case implicates an “unprecedented societal concern,” courts consider whether the problem a modern law addresses is one that “preoccupied the Founders in 1791 or the Reconstruction generation in 1868.” *Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 27; *see Rupp v. Bonta*, 723 F. Supp. 3d 837, 879 (C.D. Cal. 2024), *appeal held in abeyance*, No. 24-2583 (9th Cir.). The problem addressed by the Law—the availability of weapons like the one used by the lone gunman at Sandy Hook to murder twenty first graders and six

educators inside their school in under five minutes—is one that neither the Founding generation nor the Reconstruction generation ever contemplated.²

Mass shootings on the scale of Sandy Hook are a distinctly modern phenomenon.³ There was “no known occurrence of a mass shooting resulting in double-digit fatalities” in the first 173 years after the Nation’s founding, and the first shooting in which a single gunman killed ten or more people did not occur until 1949. *Lamont*, 153 F.4th at 239 (citation omitted). Before December 14, 2012, Americans had experienced a number of mass shootings, including several

² See Brian DeLay, *The Myth of Continuity in American Gun Culture*, 113 Calif. L. Rev. 1, 11, 39 (2025) (explaining that “[w]ould-be murderers in the mid-nineteenth century could hardly have conceived of” the “killing power” of a modern assault weapon, since semiautomatic firearms with detachable magazines did not enter the American consumer market until the turn of the twentieth century); see also *id.* at 2 (describing assault weapons and large-capacity magazines as “nonexistent or impractical technologies in the Founding era, no more likely to attract regulatory attention than jetpacks in our own times”).

³ See James M. Shultz et al., *Fatal School Shootings and the Epidemiological Context of Firearm Mortality in the United States*, 1 Disaster Health 84, 92 (2013) (finding that the twelve deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history through 2012 all occurred after 1949, and half after 2007); Patrick Sauer, *The Story of the First Mass Shooting in U.S. History*, Smithsonian Mag. (Oct. 14, 2015), <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/story-first-mass-murder-us-history-180956927/> [https://perma.cc/NDH7-KX9G] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

devastating attacks at schools.⁴ But the world had never seen anything like Sandy Hook.⁵

On the morning of the massacre, a twenty-year-old gunman killed his mother in their Newtown home, drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School, and shot his way through a plate-glass window beside the school's locked front doors.⁶ Armed with an AR-15-style assault rifle, he entered two first-grade classrooms and

⁴ *Deadliest Mass Shootings Around the World*, 6ABC (Sept. 16, 2013), <https://6abc.com/archive/8920657/> [<https://perma.cc/BB8C-53PF>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026) (listing, among others, the 1966 shooting at the University of Texas, the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School, and the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech); see also Shultz et al., *supra* note 3, at 84 (describing school “shooting massacres” as “a new phenomenon within the past 50 years”).

⁵ See *Deadliest Mass Shootings Around the World*, *supra* note 4. Sandy Hook was no less devastating within the United States. When it occurred, Sandy Hook was the second-deadliest mass shooting in United States history. Shultz et al., *supra* note 3, at 89 tbl.3; see also William Brangham & Layla Quran, *Newtown Remembers Those Killed at Sandy Hook a Decade After the Tragedy*, PBS NewsHour (Dec. 14, 2022), <https://www.pbs.org/news-hour/show/newtown-remembers-those-killed-at-sandy-hook-a-decade-after-the-tragedy> [<https://perma.cc/7KWT-7W43>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026) (describing Sandy Hook as “one of the worst mass shootings in U.S. history” and quoting the mother of a first grader killed there: “It’s become a moment in our American history.”); Conn. State Police, *After Action Report: Newtown Shooting Incident, December 14, 2012*, at 5 (2018), https://www.policinginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/csp_aar.pdf [<https://perma.cc/9K44-75XS>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026) (report by Connecticut State Police describing Sandy Hook as an “incident” of “unprecedented nature”).

⁶ See *Sandy Hook School Shooting*, HISTORY.com (Dec. 11, 2013), [https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/december-14/gunman-kills-students-and-adults-at-newtown-connecticut-](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/december-14/gunman-kills-students-and-adults-at-newtown-connecticut)

fired 154 rounds in under five minutes.⁷ Twenty of the dead were first graders. Six were the educators who tried to protect them, including the school’s principal and psychologist, who ran toward the gunfire.⁸ More than a decade later, Sandy Hook remains the deadliest shooting ever at an American elementary or secondary school.⁹

The public response to the tragedy confirmed that Sandy Hook presented a societal concern unlike any Connecticut—or the country—had confronted before. Before the legislature took up the issue, Connecticut residents immediately began organizing in their own communities—largely thanks to CAGV’s coordination. From the morning after the shooting, CAGV’s then-executive director, Ron Pinciario, fielded calls

elementary-school [https://perma.cc/R2MK-LBNS] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

⁷ *Id.*; Mark Pazniokas, *Five Awful Minutes: 154 Rounds Fired, 26 Killed*, CT Mirror (Mar. 28, 2013), <https://ctmirror.org/2013/03/28/five-awful-minutes-154-rounds-fired-26-killed/> [https://perma.cc/9C2F-Y2X2] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026); see also *Staples v. United States*, 511 U.S. 600, 603 (1994) (describing the AR-15 as “the civilian version of the military’s M-16 rifle” that is, “unless modified, a semiautomatic weapon”).

⁸ Tim Perone, *Heroic Teachers Made the Ultimate Sacrifice for Kids*, N.Y. Post (Dec. 16, 2012), <https://ny-post.com/2012/12/16/heroic-teachers-made-the-ultimate-sacrifice-for-kids/> [https://perma.cc/JH2E-XM9U] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

⁹ See Statista Rsch. Dep’t, *Number of Victims of School Shootings in the United States Between August 1982 and March 2026*, by *Number of Victims*, Statista (last updated Mar. 6, 2026), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/476381/school-shootings-in-the-us-by-victim-count/> [https://perma.cc/68YH-G9MK] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

from Connecticut residents who sought to ensure Sandy Hook could never happen again. In the weeks after the shooting, CAGV's membership grew from roughly 35,000 members and supporters to almost 150,000. Ron Pinciario, *Acknowledgment: A Memoir* 486, 498 (2024).¹⁰ CAGV channeled that engagement, urging its members to contact their representatives and to make the trip to Hartford.¹¹

The General Assembly responded in kind. In late January 2013, only weeks after the shooting, a bipartisan legislative task force of more than twenty Democrats and twenty Republicans held public hearings in Hartford and in Newtown itself.¹² The first Hartford hearing drew crowds so large that not one, but two, overflow rooms were needed, and residents waited outside in the cold for up to two hours to clear security. Pinciario, *supra*, at 499. Testimony began at 10 A.M. and ran “until well into the next morning.” *Id.* Among the first to speak was Neil Heslin, whose six-year-old

¹⁰ CAGV is grateful to Mr. Pinciario, who generously shared many of the facts, recollections, and other context recounted in this brief. Mr. Pinciario served as executive director of CAGV from 2001 to 2017.

¹¹ See Bill Cummings, *Gun Reform Advocates Converge on Hartford and Washington*, CT Post (Mar. 13, 2013), <https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/gun-reform-advocates-converge-on-hartford-and-4352179.php> [https://perma.cc/GLJ3-KXWY] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

¹² Press Release, Conn. Gen. Assembly, *Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety Schedules Hearings* (Jan. 18, 2013), <https://www.cga.ct.gov/asafcrconnecticut/docs/pressrelease0118.pdf> [https://perma.cc/G99Z-4WMS] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

son Jesse had been killed six weeks earlier. His testimony—a father describing the morning he dropped his son off at school and never saw him again—brought home to legislators of both parties that the State was confronting a problem that no generation in American history—let alone the Founding and Reconstruction generations—had ever known. *See Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 27.¹³

II. Connecticut’s Law Reflects A Bipartisan Response To An Unprecedented Societal Concern

CAGV took an active role in helping the General Assembly with proposed legislation. Pinciaro, *supra*, at 491–92, 494. Headed by Mr. Pinciaro, CAGV had twenty-five days, over the holidays, to submit finished proposals to the Judiciary Committee for the start of the 2013 session. *Id.* at 491–92. With the help of volunteer students from Yale Law School, Mr. Pinciaro immersed himself in this Court’s Second Amendment precedent and in the Nation’s early history of firearms regulation. He also studied closely the federal assault weapons ban that Congress had enacted in 1994 and in particular its structure: a features test paired with a list of specific prohibited weapons.¹⁴

¹³ *See* Mary E. O’Leary, *Victim’s Parents, Gun Advocates Testify at Task Force Hearing in Hartford (Photos)*, New Haven Register (Jan. 28, 2013), <https://www.nhregister.com/connecticut/article/Victims-parents-gun-advocates-testify-at-task-11389997.php> [<https://perma.cc/ZBA4-25MX>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

¹⁴ *See Public Hearing Before the Gun Violence Prevention Working Group of the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention & Children’s Safety*, 2013 Reg. Sess. (Conn. Jan. 28, 2013) (written testimony of Ron Pinciaro, Exec. Dir., Conn. Against

Connecticut had already learned why that combination—a features test, not a list alone—was essential. In 1993, the General Assembly enacted the State’s first assault weapons statute. *See* An Act Concerning Assault Weapons, 1993 Conn. Pub. Acts No. 93-306. Michael Lawlor, then a member of the Judiciary Committee and the bill’s House floor manager, recalls that Connecticut was confronting a serious gun-violence problem and encountering AR-15-style rifles for the first time.¹⁵ With the support of Governor Lowell Weicker, a divided House debated the bill late into the night, and most of that debate centered on a single question: What is an “assault weapon”? The 1993 Act’s answer was a list: aside from selective-fire firearms, it defined assault weapons solely by naming specific models, without reference to their features, 1993 Conn. Pub. Acts No. 93-306, § 1(a)(1), an approach then-Representative Lawlor defended as providing “the precision that is required for a criminal statute.” Conn. H.R. Proc., 1993 Reg. Sess., vol. 36,

Gun Violence), <https://www.cga.ct.gov/asaferconnecticut/tmy/0128/Ron%20Pinciario%20-%20Executive%20Director%20CAGV.PDF> [<https://perma.cc/8PPG-NEGL>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

¹⁵ CAGV is grateful to Mr. Lawlor, who generously shared many of the facts, recollections, and context recounted in this brief. Mr. Lawlor served in the Connecticut House of Representatives for twenty-four years, including sixteen as House chair of the Judiciary Committee, and from 2011 to 2019 as the Governor’s Undersecretary for Criminal Justice Policy and Planning, where he worked firsthand on the State’s legislative response to Sandy Hook. He is now an associate professor of criminal justice at the University of New Haven’s Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences.

pt. 32, at 11,543–50 (June 5, 1993). At the time, opponents warned that a manufacturer could evade the list simply by renaming its rifle, *id.* at 11,545 (statement of Rep. Piscopo); Conn. S. Proc., 1993 Reg. Sess., at 1860 (June 8, 1993) (statement of Sen. DiBella), and those warnings proved accurate: within months, companies were advertising near-identical copies of the listed Colt Sporter as legal, Conn. Office of Legis. Research, *Assault Weapons Act (PA 93-306)*, No. 94-R-0086 (Jan. 18, 1994). The General Assembly responded in 2001 by supplementing the named list with a definition keyed to a firearm’s features, matching the federal ban, and Republican Governor John Rowland signed the amendment. *See* 2001 Conn. Pub. Acts No. 01-130.

The legislation enacted in response to Sandy Hook would build upon that feature-based framework. Legislative leaders insisted it be both deliberate and bipartisan. The incoming Speaker of the House, Brendan Sharkey, had been meeting with lawmakers from both parties when news of the shooting broke, and all of them were deeply shaken. Pinciaro, *supra*, at 495. The Speaker resolved that the response had to be “a clearly bipartisan measure.” *Id.* To that end, he bypassed the Judiciary Committee, which Democrats controlled two to one, and instead sent the bill to a task force of four Democrats and four Republicans created specifically to produce a bipartisan bill. *Id.*

CAGV also worked closely, from the outset, with law enforcement, and police chiefs across the State supported the bill.¹⁶ Law enforcement officers told

¹⁶ *See, e.g., Public Hearing Before the Bipartisan Task Force on Gun Violence Prevention & Children’s Safety* 13–14 (Conn. Jan.

legislators what they had seen on the job and what they feared seeing again: officers responding to an active shooter, outgunned by a civilian carrying a military-style rifle.¹⁷ Their testimony resonated with legislators on both sides of the aisle and helped shape the final bill. The State Police were closely involved as well, working to ensure that the legislation under consideration could be administered and enforced.

The bill that emerged reflected the concerns of gun owners and Sandy Hook families alike. Governor Dannel Malloy worked closely with Republican legislators to address their constituents' concerns about gun ownership. Legislators spent weeks on core issues, including the definition of an "assault weapon"; the treatment of existing firearms in residents' hands; and how to protect hunters, sport shooters, and those who keep firearms for home defense. *See* Pinciario, *supra*, at 511–16. The final bill accommodated the concerns of gun owners in several respects: residents could keep assault weapons and large-capacity magazines they already owned by registering or declaring them by January 1, 2014, could pass registered weapons on to family members, and remained free to buy

30, 2013) (statement of Michael Kehoe, Chief, Newtown Police Dep't), <https://www.cga.ct.gov/ASaferConnecticut/docs/2013MHWG00130-R001800-CHR.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/2DRA-VA3R>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026); *id.* at 63–64 (statement of Douglas Fuchs, Chief, Redding Police Dep't).

¹⁷ *See* Libor Jany, *State's Urban Police Chiefs Want Gun Restrictions*, CT Post (Jan. 19, 2013), <https://www.ctpost.com/policereports/article/State-s-urban-police-chiefs-want-gun-restrictions-4208486.php> [<https://perma.cc/4KCD-A7BA>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

and own more than a thousand other firearms, including the bolt-action and semiautomatic rifles most hunters use.¹⁸ As one House member assured gun owners, “[f]irearms legally purchased in this state are not going to be confiscated.” Conn. H.R. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., vol. 56, pt. 3, at 920 (Apr. 3, 2013) (statement of Rep. Fleischmann).

The Democratic and Republican leaders of both chambers announced the final bill together, and on April 3, 2013, they brought it to the floor through emergency certification, a procedure that allowed it to proceed directly to a vote in both chambers. The Senate Minority Leader, whose district included Newtown, said that he was “heartened by the immense citizen involvement in the issue,” particularly from “first-time activists on both sides.” Conn. S. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., vol. 56, pts. 2–3, at 691 (Apr. 3, 2013) (statement of Sen. McKinney).

The 2013 Act was the product of extensive deliberation, careful revision, and a broad coalition-building effort. It had been debated and vetted for months, thousands of people had come to the Capitol to weigh in, and it had changed many times along the way to address the concerns of numerous stakeholders. Floor debate in the two chambers ran more than thirteen hours. Conn. S. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, at 534, 701; Conn. H.R. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, pt. 3, at 872, pt. 4, at 1189. The Senate rejected seven proposed amendments; the House rejected amendments of its own and a motion to divide the bill. Conn. S. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, at 582–667; Conn. H.R.

¹⁸ See Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53-202d(a)(2), (b).

Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, pt. 3, at 950, 1013, pt. 4, at 1082.

Ultimately, after strenuous legislative efforts and debate, the Senate passed the bill that evening by a vote of 26 to 10, with support from six of the chamber’s fourteen Republicans; the House passed it in the early hours of April 4 by a vote of 105 to 44, with twenty Republican votes in **favor**.¹⁹ The Governor, who had met with the Sandy Hook families who lost children and received their approval, signed the bill into law that afternoon. Pinciaro, *supra*, at 516–17. The families were present for the signing on what the Governor described as “a profoundly emotional **day**.”²⁰ Like most legislation produced through genuine compromise, the bill did not give any side everything it **wanted**.²¹ But it was a real victory: before Sandy Hook, few could have imagined a law like it passing at all, let alone with such broad bipartisan support. Pinciaro, *supra*, at 516–17.

¹⁹ See Conn. H.R. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, pt. 4, at 1186 (announcement of the Clerk); Conn. S. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, at 698 (announcement of the Clerk).

²⁰ *Conn. Governor Signs Sweeping Gun Limits Into Law*, CBS News (Apr. 4, 2013), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/conn-governor-signs-sweeping-gun-limits-into-law/> [<https://perma.cc/ST6G-948L>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

²¹ Republican legislator Arthur O’Neill spoke in support of the bill, arguing that while he did not “believe anyone is totally satisfied” with the result, the legislature had “struck a reasonable balance” between constituents “concerned about their right to own various kinds of firearms” and those who “were the victims at Sandy Hook.” Conn. H.R. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, pt. 3, at 951–52 (statement of Rep. O’Neill).

The resulting law—Public Act 13-3, An Act Concerning Gun Violence Prevention and Children’s Safety—targets the *specific features* that make a rifle unusually dangerous and especially lethal in the hands of a mass shooter like the one at Sandy Hook. 2013 Conn. Pub. Acts No. 13-3. Among other things, the 2013 Act replaced the State’s former two-feature test for determining whether a semiautomatic rifle is an “assault weapon” with a one-feature test. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53-202a(1)(E)(i). Under that test, a semiautomatic centerfire rifle that can accept a detachable magazine is an assault weapon if it has at least one of five enumerated features: a folding or telescoping stock; a pistol grip, thumbhole stock, or other grip that allows a finger other than the trigger finger to sit below the action; a forward pistol grip; a flash suppressor; or a grenade or flare launcher. *Id.*

The 2013 Act defines a single class of weapons in two complementary ways. It lists by name a number of specific rifle models that were in production when the Act took effect, including the model used at Sandy Hook, together with copies or duplicates of those models. Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53-202a(1)(B). It pairs that list with a features test that identifies the same class of rifles by the characteristics they share. *Id.* § 53-202a(1)(E)(i). As Senator Donald Williams, then-President Pro Tempore of the Connecticut Senate, explained in response to questions about the named rifles, “the guns that are on the list meet the criteria of the physical characteristics test. . . . [T]hose are the assault weapons, for the most part designed originally with a military platform, capable of semi-automatic fire and centerfire as opposed to rimfire.” Conn. S. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, at 658 (statement of

Sen. Williams). It is the features test that reaches a rifle regardless of its name or date of manufacture, and it was the features test that closed the loophole manufacturers had exploited under the 1993 law. The Law is predicated on the notion that the enumerated features are what make these rifles—like the military weapons on which they are modeled—accurate, easy to aim and fire even without training, and capable of being emptied very quickly.

III. The Law Is Consistent With This Nation's Tradition Of Regulating Unusually Dangerous Weapons

Because the Law responded to an unprecedented societal concern, the question under *Bruen*'s nuanced approach is whether the Law is “relevantly similar” to the laws our tradition permits, judged by “how and why” it burdens the right of armed self-defense. 597 U.S. at 29; *Rahimi*, 602 U.S. at 692. It is.

Begin with what the Law regulates. Connecticut did not ban a firearm merely because it looked menacing or unfamiliar. Instead, the legislature identified the specific characteristics that allow a shooter to fire more rounds, more accurately, and for longer while making him harder to stop, and it regulated those characteristics. A folding or telescoping stock makes a rifle easier to conceal and to maneuver through a school hallway. A pistol grip or forward grip lets a shooter control recoil and stay on target while firing rapidly. A flash suppressor hides the shooter's position from the people he is shooting at and from the officers trying to stop him. *See Lamont*, 153 F.4th at 225–26; *see also Rupp*, 723 F. Supp. 3d at 854 (finding

“undisputed evidence that each of the challenged feature-based restrictions facilitates semiautomatic assault rifles’ danger and disproportionate use in mass shootings”). And a grenade or flare launcher serves no legitimate purpose in a civilian home.

Next, consider how the Law burdens the right of armed self-defense. Apart from the most lethal weapons, firearms without the enumerated features remain lawful, as do the handguns that *Heller* called “the quintessential self-defense weapon.” 554 U.S. at 629. The Law “preserv[es] numerous legal alternatives for self-defense and other lawful purposes.” *Lamont*, 153 F.4th at 222. And residents who lawfully owned covered rifles before the 2013 Act took effect were permitted to keep them. *See* Conn. Gen. Stat. § 53-202d(a)(2). The Law thus leaves law-abiding residents armed and removes only certain unusually dangerous firearms from the market.

As to *why* the Law imposes that burden, it rests on the same justification that has animated weapons regulation in this country from its Founding, and in English law before that: legislators identified arms that were unusually dangerous because of their characteristics and restricted them. *See* Conn. Resp. Br. at 10–22. That is the tradition of regulating “dangerous or unusual weapons” that this Court has recognized, *Rahimi*, 602 U.S. at 697 (quoting 4 Blackstone, *supra*, at 149), and it “encompasses those arms that legislators determined were unusually dangerous because of their characteristics,” *Lamont*, 153 F.4th at 233 (emphasis omitted). *Heller* itself acknowledged that weapons “most useful in military service—M-16 rifles and the like—may be banned.” 554 U.S. at 627. The features the Law targets are the very ones that

make a civilian rifle most like its military counterpart.²²

That the people of Connecticut have embraced the legislature’s judgment for more than a decade confirms that the Law’s burden on armed self-defense is comparably justified. *See Bruen*, 597 U.S. at 29. In March 2013, while the bill was still being negotiated, a Quinnipiac University poll found that Connecticut voters supported expanding the State’s assault weapons ban by a margin of 68 to 28 percent.²³ Support for the State’s gun laws has remained strong in the years since. The General Assembly strengthened the 2013 Act in 2023. *See* 2023 Conn. Pub. Acts No. 23-53. And although the people of Connecticut have had more than a decade and several election cycles in which to undo what their legislators did in 2013, they have cho-sen to keep it.

For CAGV, the 2013 Act was the culmination of twenty years of work; it closed the gaps that the organization had been trying to close since its founding. And it has seen results. In the years since, Connecticut has consistently ranked among the States with the

²² Conn. H.R. Proc., 2013 Reg. Sess., *supra*, pt. 4, at 1133 (statement of Rep. Hennessey) (explaining, based on his Army service with M-16s, that “[t]he only difference between the M-16 and the weapon that was used in Sandy Hook is basically that it was not automatic, but otherwise it was the same type of weapon that was designed for the battlefield,” and that “[i]t’s an extremely lethal weapon”).

²³ Quinnipiac Univ. Poll, *Connecticut Voters Back Most Gun Measures 2-1 or More, Quinnipiac University Poll Finds; 93% Want Background Checks for All Gun Buyers* (Mar. 6, 2013), <https://poll.qu.edu/Poll-Release-Legacy?releaseid=1859> [<https://perma.cc/6G73-GVKN>] (last visited Oct. 26, 2026).

lowest rates of gun deaths in the Nation.²⁴ And in the thirteen years since its passage, Connecticut has not suffered another Sandy Hook. CAGV's members, many of whom joined because of what happened in Newtown, regard the 2013 Act as the State's most meaningful response to that tragedy.

In short, Connecticut drafted and enacted a law to regulate the firearms and features that made Sandy Hook possible; it left firearms without those unusually dangerous features available to the same extent they were before the legislation passed. This is exactly the kind of regulation the nuanced approach contemplates.

This Court's precedents "were not meant to suggest a law trapped in amber." *Rahimi*, 602 U.S. at 691. Connecticut confronted an unprecedented societal concern, and it responded as the Nation's tradition has always permitted: by identifying what made a weapon unusually dangerous and regulating those features. The Law is consistent with the Second Amendment.

CONCLUSION

The Law was the considered response of a grieving State to a form of violence that no earlier generation of Americans had confronted. It was drafted with this Court's precedents in view, debated for months, passed with bipartisan support, and narrowly drawn to reach only the specific weapons and features that

²⁴ Pinciario, *supra*, at 519; Giffords L. Ctr., *Connecticut*, Annual Gun Law Scorecard, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/resources/scorecard/?scorecard=CT> [<https://perma.cc/QL62-7873>] (last visited Oct. 27, 2026).

made Sandy Hook possible. For the foregoing reasons, *amicus curiae* respectfully asks the Court to affirm the judgments below.

Respectfully submitted,

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