

From: Bob Williamson
Sent: Wednesday, March 1, 2023 2:12 PM
To: Martin LaLonde
Subject: Bob Williamson (Gun Sense VT) RE: H.230

Dear Rep. Martin LaLonde, Chair of House Judiciary,

I am a founding board member of Gun Sense VT and a long-time advocate for suicide prevention. Below I explain how I began this work, but for right now I present my reasons for strongly supporting H.230. Our state has a clear and present need for such a law.

As you know, Vermont saw its highest number of suicides ever in 2021: 142 who took their lives. Some 50% of those (71 Vermonters) were carried out with a firearm. NOTE: 90% of all successful suicides are with a gun. Rep. Alyssa Black pointed to the alarming rate of Vermont veterans' suicides, 83.1 per 100,000, compared to the U.S. rate of 31.7 per 100,000, and that Vermont children suicides are 4.4 times greater in homes where guns are present.

I applaud the focus of Rep. Martin LaLonde, Chair of House Judiciary, on the legal implications of H.230. Should any of you wish to learn more behind the what and why the House Health Care Committee crafted H.230 the way they did, you can read the testimony from the 30 testifiers that committee received.

Access to a firearm greatly increases the chance of death in a suicide attempt. And a 72-hour waiting period will help considerably to save lives, by creating time and space to intervene. The decision to commit suicide is often impulsive, triggered by an extreme crisis. Experts underscore the value of delaying access to lethal means. Rep. Alyssa Black's son Andrew was actually prevented from using a firearm in their home because all their guns were safely stored and locked: so, safe storage worked, up to a point. He then had to buy one. He'd been experiencing an especially bad day from a breakup with a girlfriend. Had there been a waiting period, Andrew very likely would be alive today.

Safe storage is also key to preventing tragedies with gun, be they suicides or mass shootings. Had Nancy Lanza locked her guns in Newtown, CT, her son Adam wouldn't have had the ready access to kill her and then slaughter 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School. That's just not me, but also the conclusion of the National Shooting Sports Foundation (also based in Newtown, CT). In Mr. Chris Bradley's detailed testimony, he didn't present any data on individuals injured or killed because of any delay retrieving a gun for self-defense. One can open a gun safe in about four seconds by entering the combination on a keypad.

I became an advocate for sensible laws like H.230 after a shooting rampage at my children's school 35 years ago in Winnetka, IL, a sleepy town like Montpelier. One eight-year-old youngster, Nicky Corwin, was killed, and five others were critically wounded. My two daughters were spared, but only by dumb luck. We need better than dumb luck, and H.203 offers a remedy. BTW, the shooter at my children's school had been receiving psychiatric care, but the guns she used weren't secured away from her by her parents, where she was living at the time. And she was suicidal at the time of her rampage: she ended up taking her life.

Again, access to lethal means increases the chance of death.

Without rehashing the details you've already heard on ERPO measures, they do provide vital safeguards & I support expanding Vermont's ERPO to allow family members to petition the court for such a protection order.

I urge you to vote "yes" on H.230. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for all you do.

Sincerely,

Bob Williamson
Gun Sense VT board member