

My name is Mike Ferrant, Sergeant First Class-Retired, US Army, father of two teenagers, resident of Williamstown VT. Thank you for accepting my testimony today on H.230 “An act relating to implementing mechanisms to reduce suicide”. This testimony will be representing my personal perspective, NOT my professional capacity here at the State House. You may or may not have noticed that I wear a military casualty bracelet on my right wrist. It honors a Soldier under my command during my last deployment to Iraq in 2016. Upon returning home from over a year away, this citizen soldier from Berlin VT took his own life using his hunting rifle in his bedroom at his parent’s house. He was 20 years old. His mother found him first. His father remains emotionally broken by the event. During his deployment, he carried an m4 rifle which was “Red” status during the deployment for sustained periods of time. Red means there is a full magazine loaded in the rifle and a round loaded in the chamber, but the weapon is placed on “safe” and within arm’s reach at ALL times. Access to firearms was not an obstacle to his final decision. I’ve worn this bracelet every moment since his funeral on August 16, 2016. That was also my last day of service in over 20 years in the Army Reserves. I still keep in regular touch with his parents to this day. We gather at his grave near exit 7 on many anniversaries throughout the year.

When H.230 was being reported on the House Floor by Representative Alyssa Black last month, I was sitting in the balcony of the House Chamber listening to her. She reported staggering numbers, recounted several stories of suicides, and included a very graphic description of her own son’s final moments and the aftermath of that moment. Her words and the emotion behind them struck me. I thought of my Soldier and his family. What they’ve gone through. Then, I thought of the AR-15 rifle that I’ve always kept on “red” in my bedroom at home. I’m familiar, trained, and proficient with my firearm and always practice the safest handling and firing of it. It will protect my home and my family if ever needed. But now I have teenagers in the house. Impulsive teenagers that don’t think about future ramifications of choices made today. They just don’t. As I sat there listening to her and reading the bill on my phone, I became increasingly anxious about the status of my own firearm situation at home.

After her report, I researched different types of firearms locks for my style rifle. My main concern was time. I couldn’t sacrifice my family’s safety due to loss of time

unlocking our protection in an emergency. That's just how my brain works, all the time. I imagined someone breaking in, my children and fiancé scared and needing defense, while I searched for and fumbled with a key, lock, chest, whatever. That visual terrifies me. So, I researched. I googled. I scoured Amazon. I found a biometric trigger lock with excellent reviews of the ease of use, quick and reliable fingerprint scanning, and low profile on the rifle. At \$89.99 it was a safe chance to take. I clicked order now and it arrived in the mailbox 2 days later. The day it arrived, my son was playing xbox with his best friend, as they always do, when the friend's mom sent me a text message. She said "I know they talk trash, but this REALLY bothers me" and sent a screenshot from her son's phone. It was my son telling him "go kill yourself" and that was all. I stared at my screen for a long, sobering time. That moment, I made my decision to always secure my firearms better at home. For him. We talked it through, loudly at times, and resolved that he really understood and would apologize to his best friend "who did it first, everyone does" and that MY son would NEVER stoop to that level again. I have practiced putting the lock on and taking it off several times. I'm now proficient at it and can unlock my rifle and have it fire ready within 2 seconds. For me, \$90 and 2 seconds is an acceptable sacrifice to protect my family from intruders, and themselves.

I won't pretend to know or have an opinion about whether or not H.230 should pass into law and whether or not it will do any good. I don't believe it would have changed my Soldier's decision, but maybe it would prevent my impulsive son or his friend from doing something permanent in the moment. I'll leave that decision making up to you folks, who have a lot more practice in that than me. However, I've come to the decision that I'm going to use my biometric lock from now on because for me it's THE RIGHT THING TO DO. I hope other firearms owners will see this and make the same decisions for their families and households. Thank you for your time.