

Good morning,

Thank you for all of your work to improve the systems that support children, youth, and adults in Vermont. I have been particularly moved by your work on suicide prevention.

I was moved by the stories shared on February 10th and appreciate your committee's work since then. Today, I am writing to give a bit more context of how my human experience has impacted my interest in the issues you are addressing.

I graduated high school in 1997, on October 10th of 1997 I was settling into college in Vermont. My world was expanding, and I was planning a trip to travel back home to upstate NY to catch up with family and friends, when I received a call that a friend of mine was murdered. She ended her high school relationship and within 24 hours, her partner asked to meet and used a gun to kill her and then himself. The firearm he used was not secured, which gave him the opportunity to make a life altering decision within minutes.

During the testimony on the 10th, I heard a few of you ask about the ripple effects of an unexpected loss of life. I would like to use this opportunity to share that the ripples are unpredictable and often significant. I still connect with the parents of my friend annually and am still deeply saddened by the magnitude of the trauma caused in a split second by what I can only imagine was pain and despair that likely would have subsided with time. Two young lives were lost that day. I attended the Million Mom March in DC on Mother's Day in the year 2000 with my mother. My friend's mother was also there. I am deeply troubled that over two decades later, with a steady increase in gun violence, we are still here debating the merits of waiting periods for firearm purchases and safe storage.

I also heard you ask about the impact of media, and I am aware there is a bill that intends to address the role of media when a child/youth dies. I am compelled to share that when I think back to the funeral for my friend, I can feel my reaction to the media's presence in my body. I remember stepping outside of the funeral home, with her sister, and cameras closing in. I felt violated. I was even more angry when I saw myself falling apart on the evening news. In the bigger picture, the news coverage was inconsequential, but I also think there is a difference between sharing news and invading an intimate moment in a person's life. Healthy boundaries around media can offer a family and community time to notify, process, and grieve with dignity.

I have also lost a friend to a non-firearm murder, lost others to suicide, and had folks in my immediate network attempt suicide. I hope that it is okay that I am sharing all this. I am not your direct constituent, but wanted to let you know that I appreciate you and your work. It matters.

Sincerely, Amy