



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

February 27, 2023

RE: Support H 230 sections 1(d) and 4-6 - An act relating to implementing mechanisms to reduce suicide

Chair LaLonde and members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention writes in support of H 230 section 1(d) to promote education about secure firearm storage and suicide prevention and sections 4-6 to permit family & household members to petition courts for Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs).

In Vermont in 2021, suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death for youth, teens, and young adults ages 15-34, the 3rd leading cause for adults ages 35-44, and the 9th leading cause of death overall. That same year, more than half of all suicides were by firearm and more than 89% of all firearm deaths in the state were suicides; 28% of those firearm suicides occurred among young people ages 10-34 years.

Firearms are the most commonly used and most lethal method (“means”) of suicide. For this reason, effective suicide prevention efforts **must** address firearm safety and access to firearms by Vermont residents at risk for suicide. We know from research that the presence of a firearm in the home increases risk of suicide, and that separating suicidal individuals from a variety of lethal means, including firearms, helps prevent suicide. Voluntary action to make the environment safe from lethal means, including firearms, is therefore an essential component of any effective suicide prevention strategy.

Most individuals who are prevented from making a suicide attempt via one method typically do not go on to attempt with another method. If we can prevent a person who intends to die by firearm suicide from attempting with that firearm, they will likely not go on to attempt with another method. If they do substitute another method, it will likely be less lethal.

H 230 section 1(d) would simply ensure that individuals purchasing a firearm, as well as students and their parents, are made aware of the risks associated with firearms, suicide prevention resources, state laws requiring secure firearms storage, and the importance of secure storage in protecting minors by requiring firearms dealers and schools to distribute and post such information on the premises or online. These resources can enable those at risk of suicide to take voluntary steps to ensure their own safety and enable parents that keep firearms in the home to regularly assess whether their current place of storage is safe from child access.

Putting time and distance between a person at risk and lethal means can save lives: this allows time for the suicidal risk to diminish, for the intense suicidal impulse to pass, or for someone to intervene

with mental health support and resources. Whenever possible, AFSP recommends firearms be stored safely or removed from the home voluntarily and temporarily during a time of increased risk. However, there needs to be a mechanism in place to keep at-risk individuals safe in instances where safe storage or voluntary removal of firearms is not an option. AFSP supports ERPOs as a tool to help prevent suicide when voluntary efforts to separate an at-risk individual from a firearm are unsuccessful or impossible and suicide risk is imminent. In these cases, the use of an ERPO can fill a gap that currently exists for families who want to protect a loved one who owns a firearm but who isn't able or willing to take the voluntary steps to ensure safety during a suicidal crisis.

H 230 sections 4-6 would expand eligible petitioners under Vermont's ERPO law to include family and household members, as many other states already have, thereby allowing those who are best positioned to know if their loved one is at risk of harming themselves or others to directly petition a court to temporarily remove that person's access to firearms.

AFSP is the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide; our Vermont chapter carries out this mission across the state. We appreciate your consideration of H 230. We firmly believe that attention and commitment to suicide prevention and firearms safety has important implications for the current and future health and well-being of all Vermont residents.

Sincerely,



Heather White
Area Director
AFSP Vermont



Nicole Gibson
Senior Director
State Policy & Grassroots Advocacy