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**Testimony on S. 141
For Vermont House Judiciary Committee**

First I want to express my appreciation to the Honorable Representatives and staff members who are hearing this testimony. As the President of the Vermont Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), I am representing the Pediatricians of VT, and am here today to express our support for passage of S 141. I am a Professor of Pediatrics at UVM College of Medicine, where I practice and teach Primary Care Pediatrics, for the past 30 years.

As physicians who provide care for Vermont's children and who help guide family members in keeping those children safe and healthy, we have long recognized the importance of firearm violence and suicide as *preventable* problems in our state.

Data from the CDC, covering the most recent 15 year period for which data are available, show that Vermont has a sadly high rate of suicide over all ages (15th highest among all states); firearms are the method used in over 56% of those deaths. During that same time period, we lost 61 teens aged 13-19 years to suicide, making suicide the second leading cause of death for teens; and like their elders, 56% of those teenagers used firearms to kill themselves.

Sadly, depression in Vermont youth is extremely common: the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey showed that 21% of High School Students and 18% of Middle School Students felt sad or hopeless every day for 2 weeks in the previous year. Eleven % of these students made a suicide plan, and 5% attempted suicide. If firearms had been available to more of these students, we would have seen an even greater number of deaths.

But while most of our firearm injury deaths are suicides, we are hardly immune to firearm homicides. The majority of our homicides in recent decades have occurred in the form of Domestic Violence - and as documented in reports from our Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission, the majority of such homicides have been carried out with firearms. The report in 2012 documented 108 DV homicides over the previous 18 yr period, 62 of which were carried out with firearms. There were 33 cases where children were present at the crime scene. Loss of a parent is a MAJOR Adverse Childhood Event (ACE), and these children will most likely suffer from PTSD and major mental health issues into their adult lives.

Regardless of whether a firearm injury death occurs as a suicide or a homicide or as a tragic accident, every death affects loved ones, friends, and families - including children.

Following the horrific tragedy in Newtown, a large number of our state's pediatricians (almost 100) signed and circulated a letter sent to all members of the legislature, calling on our leaders to take specific steps to reduce the risk of gun violence and suicide. We called on our leaders to take a number of steps: among other measures we called for enacting comprehensive background checks; for supporting better funding for and access to mental health care; and for finding ways to improve the respectful identification of those with specific mental illness conditions and instability that make it unsafe for them to keep or purchase firearms.

As pediatricians who care for and about children, we are disappointed that the present bill does not include a provision for comprehensive background checks that might have been most effective in protecting our citizens and children. Nonetheless, it does contain measures that we believe will save lives by helping to reduce access to firearms for specifically identified persons who almost *everyone* would agree should not have them.

We also support the provision in the bill that calls for study of ways to implement the *Gun Shop Project* that has been developed in New Hampshire (also, we understand, in other states). This project was begun through the joint efforts of gun dealers and public health workers. It seeks to help increase awareness that the risk of suicide can be increased in cases where temporary crises or severe depression exist in conjunction with easy access to a gun. It helps gun dealers learn to recognize warning signs of suicide and to share information and steps that can be taken by families and loved ones to reduce the risk of suicide.

Pediatricians believe S. 141 represents an important step forward in Vermont, toward reducing the tragic toll that firearm violence and injury takes on our citizens. By passing this legislation you can help to make Vermont's children and their families safer. Supporting this legislation shows that Vermont cares about Children and Adolescents' First Amendment Right - the Right to Life!

Thank you very much.