



February 20, 2015

TO: Senator Claire Ayer, Chair  
Senator Virginia Lyons, Vice-Chair  
Senate Health and Welfare Committee

FROM: Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy  
RE: S.31

Thank you, Senators, for the opportunity to speak to you about S.31.

- According to the Vermont Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission's 2013 report, half of all homicides in Vermont between 1994 and 2012 were domestic violence related. Of those homicides, 56% were committed with firearms. 80% of Vermont's domestic violence murder-suicides during this time were committed with firearms.<sup>i</sup>
- Women in the US are 11 times more likely to be murdered with guns than women in other high-income countries.<sup>ii</sup>
- When a gun is present in a domestic violence situation, it increases the risk of homicide for women by 500 percent.<sup>iii</sup>
- In 2011, over half of all women murdered by guns in the United States were killed by intimate partners or family members.<sup>iv</sup>

**Universal background checks for all firearms sales are a critical tool in preventing homicide.**

Federal firearms regulations prohibit felons (including most perpetrators of sexual violence), perpetrators who have been convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence, and persons subject to final protection orders from possessing guns. Vermont should move toward meeting or exceeding standards set by federal law by implementing common-sense provisions to protect victims and prevent further violence.

Abusers and sex offenders should be prevented from using loopholes to purchase firearms without a background check. **46% fewer women are murdered by partners in states that have enacted legislation requiring a background check for every handgun sale.**<sup>v</sup> Vermont must

consistently implement stringent universal background checks for all purchasers of firearms. Vermont must require unlicensed sellers to initiate a background check when transferring a firearm, using state as well as federal records and databases. Universal background checks and removal and storage of firearms from prohibited persons, simply put, will keep guns out of the hands of those who would use them to harm their partners, families and our communities.

**The lives of victims of domestic violence depend on our state's ability to keep firearms out of the hands of domestic abusers and others prohibited by law from possessing guns.** For these reasons, the Vermont Network supports the passage of S.31.

Thank you,

~Auburn L. Watersong

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<sup>i</sup> State of Vermont Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission, *2013 Report*, p. 2.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://everytown.org/documents/2014/10/guns-and-violence-against-women.pdf>, p.32.

<sup>iii</sup> J.C. Campbell, S.W. Webster, J.Koziol-McLain, et al., Risk factors for femicide within physically abusive intimate relationships: results from a multi-state case control study, *93 Amer. J. of Public Health* 1089-97 (2003).

<sup>iv</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Supplementary Homicide Report*, 2011.

<sup>v</sup> "State Background Check Requirements and Rates of Domestic Violence Homicide." <http://everytown.org/documents/2015/01/dv-background-checks-fact-sheet.pdf> based on data obtained from Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Supplementary Homicide Reports*, 2011, available at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/33527/version/1>. Excludes New York due to incomplete data; Florida Department of Law Enforcement. *Supplementary Homicide Report*. 2010.