

[Sensible Gun Law Reform in Vermont](#): An Open Letter to the Vermont Legislature  
February 27, 2018

Dear Friends:

First, thank you.

I don't believe there is anyone serving in our Vermont legislature that does not have the best interest of our children and our society at heart. Each of you, I believe, is working and fighting for a better world albeit through the lens of your personally held values and priorities; and based on the paradigm of what you believe are the desires of your constituents.

America has a deep and complex relationship with guns. Issues around gun control are a flashpoint. In Vermont and across the nation guns are a source of pride for some and a source of fear for others. According to the Pew Research Center, "About four-in-ten U.S. adults say they live in a gun-owning household." "Most gun owners (67%) cite protection as a major reason for owning a gun." And, "About three-quarters of gun owners say owning a gun is essential to their freedom."

We all know what's at stake here. The trick is finding our best path forward without circumventing or stepping on the Second Amendment or Article 16 of The Constitution of the State of Vermont. Our call is not to eliminate or confiscate firearms. Our call is to compassion, commonsense, and sensibility. Our call is to strict, sensible, commonsense laws that protect life and liberty.

Yes, I am appealing to emotion, but more importantly, I am appealing to reason.

From the enactment of *The National Firearms Act of 1934*, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt after the Chicago St. Valentine's Day Massacre in 1929 through the *2008 NICS* (National Instant Criminal Background Check System) *Improvement Amendments Act* passed by Congress after the Virginia Tech shooting (2007) there have been a total of six major federal gun laws enacted, each after major acts of violence. To my knowledge, none of these laws violate the Second Amendment. However, since the last law was passed in 2008, and since the Sandy Hook (2012) and the recent Parkland massacres no new major federal laws have been passed. Congress is shackled. It is time for our states to take heed and take the lead.

According to the Gun Violence Archive.org, in the first two months of 2018 there have been 7659 gun incidents in America. Of these, 81 children age 0-11 and 399 teens age 12-17 have been killed or injured. In the same two months, there have been 34 mass shootings (defined by the FBI as "a multiple homicide incident in which four or more victims are murdered within one event..."). According to the same source, there were 273 mass shootings in 2017.

The Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence states that, to date, seven states and the District of Columbia have enacted gun laws. According to the law center, **states with the strictest gun control laws have the lowest rates of gun-related deaths.**

In Vermont, beginning with the passing of S221 (“An act relating to establishing extreme risk protection orders”), we will take a major step in the right direction, but there’s much more work to be done. H422 (“An act related to confiscation of dangerous or deadly weapons from a person arrested or cited for domestic assault”) has passed the House but has been held in the Judiciary Committee since 3/23/17. S6 (“An act related to requiring background checks for the transfer of firearms”) has been held by the same committee since 1/10/17. Much of this delay seems destined to change very soon.

The list of needed reforms is lengthy. Every item on the list may be contentious or debatable, but every item needs to be seriously considered by law makers now. It’s not a matter of if another shooting will occur. It’s a matter of when. Every item on the list is far from perfect, but every item puts distance between an active shooter and his or her agent of harm – the gun.

A comprehensive list of needed reforms includes:

- Ensuring every firearm purchaser has a background check and passes a gun safety test similar to a hunters’ or drivers’ license.
- Banning the sale of civilian versions of assault or tactical firearms – confiscating existing legally owned firearms should not be considered.
- Banning the sale of add-ons that circumvent the ban on automatic weapons.
- Increasing the age for purchasing firearms.
- Ensuring that people detained for or ordered by courts to be treated for mental illness cannot purchase firearms.
- Ensuring, through a system of due process, that people being watched for possible terrorist activities or who are on a no-fly list cannot purchase a firearm.
- Ensuring that any person threatening to commit a school shooting whether by word or over social media be placed on an FBI watch list.
- At the discretion of the school, making substantial resources available for security measures. Consider classroom panic buttons wired directly to law enforcement.
- Holding state agencies accountable for failures to identify credible threats.
- And, perhaps most importantly, substantially stepping up preventive action research into the nexus of violence in mass media, gun violence, and mental illness.

Yes, there will be ways around these measures. Killers will kill, but why should we make it easy? Every constitutionally sound effort we can make to thwart a killer’s actions is the right thing to do.

Clearly, the work in Vermont has already begun. We are listening to our students and hopefully listening carefully to each other. The Governor, the state legislature, law enforcement professionals, teachers, school boards, students, and parents must unite behind one mission – safe schools – no murders.

Respectfully submitted,

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