

**TESTIMONY OF CLAI LASHER-SOMMERS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – GUN SENSE VERMONT**

**BEFORE
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
March 28, 2018**

Chair Sears and members of the Committee, my name is Clai Lasher-Sommers. I was born in Vermont and now serve as the Executive Director for GunSense Vermont.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. GunSense Vermont is a growing coalition of concerned citizens who understand that there is no other threat to public safety in the United States that looms as large as gun violence. GunSense Vermont advocates for universal background check legislation and other measures that are aimed at reducing violence and death from firearms.

I am here today to urge the committee to support the House passed version of S. 55 which includes two types of polices. First, to keep guns out of the wrong hands, the bill sets up a better background check system in Vermont and prohibits purchases by those that are untrained and under the age of 21. Second, to reduce casualties if, heaven forbid, there is a mass shooting here the bill limits the lethality of semi-automatic guns.

Stepping back, it is our sense that these gun violence prevention provisions can help make communities safer. We do not claim these

laws are going to stop every bad actor. Instead, together they have proven to lower the incidence of gun violence harm.

S.55's requirement for a criminal background check on all gun sales is the single most effective policy for keeping guns out of the hands of people with dangerous histories. Vermont needs a background check law that is comprehensive—one that covers unlicensed sellers. People that we have already identified as too dangerous, like convicted felons, domestic abusers, and the severely mentally ill can now too easily avoid a background check by purchasing from an unlicensed seller, such as at a garage sale, an auction, or in a meet up. We support the minor changes made by the House.

S.55's requirement for a person under the age of 21 to be certified or trained to purchase a gun makes sense. Recent school shooting tragedies in Florida, Maryland and Kentucky shows us what can happen when guns are in the hands of youth who lack the maturity to formulate reasonable responses to troubling life situations. While, those states may feel far away we all know that closer to home an 18-year-old who was accused of planning a shooting at Fair Haven High School was too easily able to legally purchase a gun.

First, youth ages 18-to-20 commit gun homicides at a rate nearly 4 times greater than adults 21 and older.

Second, in the most recent year of available CDC data, more than 1,600 American children were killed with guns, and nearly 7,000 were injured – an average of 23 children shot every day.

Common sense tells us that if we can slow a dangerously-ill teenager down there is a better chance for mental health and social interventions to work.

We support the minor revisions the House made to this provision that clarify the training opportunities for people under 21.

S.55 also includes two provisions aimed at reducing the lethality of both everyday gun violence and the potentially horrific, unthinkable of a mass shooting in Vermont: the ban on bump stocks and limits on sales of high capacity feeding devices. We support both of these provisions.

Large or High capacity magazines (HCM) allow a shooter to fire more bullets without reloading. The danger posed by HCMs is apparent: the more bullets a shooter can fire, the more gunshot wounds he can inflict.

- **State HCM prohibitions are associated with [lower rates of high-casualty shootings](#).** Michael Siegel, a leading gun violence researcher, found that states with HCM prohibitions experience shootings with 3 or more victims (not necessarily fatalities) at [half the rate](#) of states without HCM prohibitions.

- **Mass shootings involving HCMs also see higher numbers of fatalities and injuries.**
 - Of the mass shooting incidents tracked by Everytown for Gun Safety since 2009, 8 of the top 10 highest casualty incidents involved the use of HCMs (ie. Las Vegas, Orlando, Aurora, Sutherland Springs, Fort Hood, San Bernardino, Newtown, and Tucson).
 - The mass shootings where HCM use has been confirmed are associated with twice the number of fatalities and nearly 40 times the number of injuries.

- **Limits on HCM can reduce lethality in mass shootings—in two high-profile instances, lives were saved when the gunman had to pause to reload.**
 - The gunman in Tucson, AZ who killed six people and injured 13 others in a supermarket parking lot in 2011 used a handgun equipped with a 33-round magazine. His shooting spree was only interrupted when he was tackled by a bystander as he finally stopped to reload his weapon.
 - In the tragic Newtown school shooting, nine children were able to run from a targeted classroom while the gunman paused to change out a large-capacity thirty-round magazine.

These types of life saving moments matter. That is why I am grateful for your efforts to advance these centrist gun violence prevention policies.

Thank you to the Committee for your time.

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