

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

**BEFORE
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
FEBUARY 22, 2018**

Chair Sears and members of the Committee, my name is Clai Lasher-Sommers. I am the Executive Director for GunSense Vermont.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. GunSense Vermont is a growing coalition of concerned citizens—gun owners, non-gun owners, Democrats, Republicans, Progressives, Independents, and more—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 will keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them.

On behalf of Gun Sense Vermont, I am here today to urge the committee to support Senator Sears and Senate Bill 221. This bill is not only timely, it is necessary.

The devastating school shooting in Parkland, Florida last week is yet another reminder that without action from our lawmakers at both the state local and national level, our children will continue to be killed in preventable acts of gun violence. While, Florida may feel far away closer to home we heard about an 18-year-old who was accused of planning a shooting at Fair Haven High School. 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.

I'm grateful that today in Vermont we have the opportunity to pass legislation that would create a sensible tool that might have helped prevent the shooting in Parkland: An Extreme Risk Protection Order. This is a policy that empowers family members and law enforcement seek a court order to temporarily restrict a person's access to guns when they pose a serious danger to themselves or others. This tool could help prevent future mass shootings as well as gun suicide.

It's important to note that Vermont's suicide rate per 100,000 residents is **higher than the national average** and it has the 16th highest suicide rate in the country. Majority of the suicide deaths are by guns.ⁱ

Based on the CDC data between 2012-2016, **every year on average 60 Vermont residents die suicide by gun**. Nearly 9 out of 10 gun deaths in the state are attributed to suicides.ⁱⁱ Between 2012-2016, nearly 300 Vermont residents died by suicide by gun, exceeding the national rate. Nearly **60 percent of all suicide deaths** were carried out with a gun.ⁱⁱⁱ

Extreme Risk Protection Order could help save lives by preventing people in crisis from harming themselves or others--this life-saving tool can help prevent warning signs from escalating into tragedy. If Florida had had a law that empowered the shooter's family

or law enforcement to request an Extreme Risk Protection Order when they saw warning signs, steps could have been taken to restrict his access to guns and perhaps to prevent this tragedy.

Thanks to Senator Sears, S. 221 **would establish an Extreme Risk Protection Order**. I hope people realize that this type of tragedy can happen anywhere, including here in Vermont. It's up to us as parents and community members to speak out and demand that lawmakers prioritize the safety of our children and our families.

Thank you.

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ⁱ Centers for Disease Control, "WISQARS" (Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System)," available at <http://1.usa.gov/VTdKK9>. Date of last access: Jan 2018.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, CDC. 2012-2016 Vermont Suicide Firearm Deaths and Rates per 100,000. Fatal Injury Reports 2011-2016, for National, Regional, and States (RESTRICTED). Retrieved January 10, 2018, from http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/fatal_injury_reports.html