

February 21, 2018

Hello, my name is Eli Pine, and I'm a senior at Burlington High School. Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I came to the Statehouse to speak on my support for comprehensive gun legislation. I support the three bills that have been introduced: H.422: An act relating to confiscation of dangerous weapons from a person cited for domestic assault; S.221: An act relating to extreme risk protection orders, and S.6: An act relating to requiring background checks for the transfer of firearms. According to Gunsense VT, in the 18 states that require criminal background checks on unlicensed gun sales, 38% fewer women are killed by guns and gun trafficking is 48% lower. A Lincoln Park Strategy survey found that 81% of voters in Vermont support requiring all gun buyers to pass a criminal background check, so the overwhelming majority of Vermonters want this legislation to pass. Even gun owners in Vermont support universal background checks, in fact, 77% of gun owners support background checks for all sales. Gun violence in the United States has reached a tipping point, and the Washington Post reports that US school shootings happen at a higher rate than 36 countries combined. In 2010, the US had a population of 309 million, the population of the other countries totaled 3.8 billion. A Washington Post-ABC Poll showed that 77% of Americans believe Congress is not doing enough to stop mass shootings, and so I ask, will our representatives here in Vermont listen to the people whom they

represent? I ask, when will we value our children more than our guns? How many more thoughts and prayers do we have to listen to until something is done to prevent these sordid acts of violence? Please stand up and support these bills in order take a giant step forward towards making our society a safer place. The next generation is counting on you.

**Vermont Youth Lobby Testimony on S.221
Senate Judiciary Committee
Thursday, February 22, 2018
Emma Harter, Junior, Montpelier High School**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 221 today.

My name is Emma Harter. I am a Junior at Montpelier High School.

I expect that the safety of the general public, of youth, is a common concern among the legislature. I expect my representatives to work across the aisle to preserve our safety. I expect political leaders to treat gun violence like the national crisis it is, and I hope that they see gun control as an investment in the prosperity of our future.

On January 16th I did not expect to be in lockdown for two hours. I did not expect to be hiding from the windows. American students have been taught what to do in the case of terror and tragedy. We are taught to move to the corner of the room farthest from the door and hide from the windows. And then hope that it's all a drill. Almost every other month Montpelier high school students do this.

January 16th was an isolated incident on the school campus. Still it left each person in our school community thinking:

What would I do if someone came into my school shooting a gun?

This is the question that consumes the minds of students all over America, and the question I hope you will reflect on after these student testimonies. Political leaders have the opportunity and the power to prevent potential tragedy in my life and the lives of my friends.

When I go to school, I expect that I will be able to learn without fearing for my life or safety.

But these drills are now common place, nearly a part of our curriculum. We take time out of our school day for fear-based learning. There are resources dedicated to training all of us to avoid

being killed while in school. You have the legislative ability to decrease the fear in our schools and remove the distraction from our education.

I am here to ask you to support the passage of S.221, as well as H.422 and S.6. These are common sense bills focused on preventing the loss of human life. S.221 would allow a law enforcement officer to remove firearms from someone who is demonstrating that they may be dangerous. Each of these bills may prevent a potential murder, mass murder, or suicide.

Youth today have grown up constantly exposed to news of students dying from gun violence and yet our country remains silent on the issue of reasonable gun control. The students are here today because our political leadership chooses to accept headlines such as, "Gunman Massacres 20 Children at School in Connecticut; 28 Dead, Including Killer."

Don't let another school become a headline.

Please support the passage of S.221, H.422, and S.6.

Thank you.

We are here before you today, because you need to hear from Vermont students, that we do not feel safe in our schools. As 34 mass shootings have already been counted since the beginning of 2018, less than two months time, with eight deadly shootings occurring in schools, it shouldn't be hard to figure out why.

I was watching videos the other day about the Florida shooting, and stumbled across one of a candlelight vigil held in honor of those who had been killed. Now, we don't know what it is like to experience something as violent and horrific as this killing was. But we know what it's like to lose people. We know the tremendous cost of this sense of community that brings towns like Fairhaven together and allows them to mobilize like they are doing now. We know what it feels like to attend a candlelight vigil in honor of those you love, only half hearing the speeches because you're still partially in shock, embracing those you never thought you would because you didn't realize how much you loved them until something like this happens and it suddenly hits you that life is so precious.

We know that accidents, they happen. We can't protect the world from those. But unnecessary violence we can prevent. That is exactly what this bill is about. It is not about taking away people's guns or ~~people's~~ ^{their} rights. It is not about taking away people's right to hunt or defend themselves. It is about protecting the right of children in our country to live into adulthood. As stated on page 2, lines 1 through 5 of this bill, the court shall grant an extreme risk protection order only if it finds clear and convincing evidence, not only that the respondent poses a significant danger of causing injury to themselves or another person, but that this danger will be caused by purchasing, possessing, or having a firearm under their control.

This bill is not about taking away people's rights. Yes, there are those who may temporarily lose their right to own a gun if this bill is passed. But when did we decide that this uncontestable right was more important than the lives of our country's children? Everybody thinks, "it won't happen to us'," But we know personally, that tragedy can strike the smallest, most unsuspecting communities like Waterbury and the Mad River Valley.

We know it almost happened in Fair Haven. We couldn't prevent the loss that we suffered, but we want to do whatever we can to prevent others from feeling anything like it, and that begins with this Bill.

Hello,

My name is Kiran Waqar and I am a senior at South Burlington High School. Being the daughter of two Pakistani immigrants, school has always meant a lot in my household. For my parents, my education is why they came to this country. To them, getting a quality education is an essential step to achieving the illustrious American Dream for themselves and their children. To me, it's gaining the knowledge I need so I can form my own informed opinions about the world around me. And while we may have our differences in belief, my parents and I both agree that school should always be a safe place. We, students, should *never* have to fear for our safety in a place we are meant to learn, but time and time again we are faced with the terrifying reality. Whether it be the tragic events at Sandy Hook or at Parkland, we've been forced to repeatedly discuss what it means to live in America, to live in Vermont, right now. It means living in a place where universal background checks haven't been instated, and a place where law enforcement can't remove a gun from a dangerous or domestically abusive situation. It means that the most terrifying part of school isn't AP Chemistry or finals, but rather if we're really safe. I will never forget the terror my eight-year-old brother experienced when he learned about the events just recently in Fair Haven. He's eight. He should be worrying about the newest soccer game and his upcoming science fair project, not his safety.

In these past couple of days, I have been shocked to hear once again the opposition to implementing common sense gun reform. In the classroom, whether it be understanding Newton's laws or discussing the three branches of government, I have been taught to find creative solutions for the problems around me and to think outside the box. However, in this situation, the problem and the solution are obvious. When history and recent events have shown that America is in desperate need of gun reform, gun reform should be enacted. For this reason, I support S.6, S.221, H.422.

Thank you.