

I am Kathleen Shepherd, a resident of Norwich VT for 40 years, a retired public school teacher and grandmother, and a member of GunSense Vermont. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

As an educator and parent, I know how impulsive young people can be, and how overwhelmed they can be by temporary feelings. Most of us have seen the current brain research that shows how the frontal cortex, that part of our brains that moderates feelings with reasoning, does not complete its development until people are well into their 20's. That is why we hear, far too often, the terrible news of a young person taking his or her own life. Last year, I got that tragic news from a dear friend who is with me at this hearing today. Her son's young life ended with a gun suicide. I am concerned about how easy it is for young people in our state to get a gun, on an impulse.

Suicide is almost always an impulsive act. Of those who survive a suicide attempt, the vast majority never attempt it again, and long term studies show that 90% of them do not go on to die by suicide. Suicidal crises are often short-lived. By delaying or limiting access to guns among those at risk of suicide, we can save lives.

Waiting period laws can make all the difference between a suicide that ends a life and devastates loved ones forever. These laws require a certain number of days to elapse between the purchase of a firearm and when the purchaser can actually take possession of that firearm. This "cooling off" period can allow a gun purchaser to reconsider their intentions. States with waiting periods have been shown to reduce their rates of firearm suicide.

I am grateful that our legislature passed an Extreme Risk Prevention Order law in the last session. Families who have well founded fear that a loved one intends to harm self or others can now get the help of law enforcement to temporarily remove firearms from that troubled person. Health Care providers should also be able to use the ERPO law to interrupt someone's suicidal intentions.

Gun violence in our state is at the root of a public health epidemic of suicide. Since 2000, nearly one thousand Vermont residents have died by gun suicide, including more than 100 people under age 25. Gun suicides also have a significant impact on veterans and older residents of the state. I remember the grief of one of my students, when her dear uncle, a veteran, took his life. In 2017, Vermont's firearm suicide rate was 1.5 times higher than the national firearm suicide rate, and nearly three times higher than that of other Northeastern states. It's time to pass Senate Bill 169 and the related House bills. Thank you.