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H.610 Public Hearing Testimony

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My name is Johanna de Graffenreid, I am a resident of Montpelier and am proud to serve as a Board Member for the Sexual Assault Crisis Team of Washington County. I support H. 610 because keeping firearms away from perpetrators of violence helps keep all of us safe.

The Sexual Assault Crisis Team of Washington County (SACT) works to provide advocacy and services for people of all genders who have experienced harm, and to educate for the prevention of all forms of sexual violence. SACT exists to transform relationships at all levels of our community; to build knowledge and skills in empathy, power, equity, respect, communication, and accountability. Intersections of poverty, classism, sexism, capitalism, ableism, heterosexism, substance use, and racism work together to create a community where hate and violence is expressed in a variety of harmful ways. We believe that all people should have freedom and autonomy over their bodies, and that sexual violence against one person harms entire communities. We wish to address the root causes of sexual violence in our community and work toward the end of violence.

To that end, it is important to note that over half of the homicides in the past 25 years in Vermont have been domestic violence related homicides, and more than half of those homicides were committed with firearms. An abuser's access to firearms is the leading lethality risk factor for victims of domestic violence. At SACT we understand that Between 40% and 45% of women in abusive relationships will also be sexually assaulted during the course of the relationship, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. In enacting this legislation you are protecting Vermonters from a multitude of forms of violence. An abuser doesn't have to fire a gun to use it to threaten or abuse their partners or children - abuse is about the power to control - and survivors become victims if they cannot leave due to even the threat of gun violence. For those reasons we support:

Section 1: Closes the Charleston Loophole

- Under current law, a firearms dealer can transfer a firearm to a buyer after three days, **even if the background check system hasn't cleared the purchaser.**
- The proposed bill would require that if a background check hasn't been completed, that a firearms dealer has to wait 30 days to transfer the weapon to see if the background check comes through.

At SACT we have seen first hand that the most dangerous time for victims is when they leave an abusive partner. This is the most important time for abusers not to have access to firearms and to keep victims safe. For those reasons we support:

Sections 2 & 3: Addresses Firearms and Protection Orders

- Strengthens protections for victims of domestic violence who seek safety through the civil protection order process.
- Requires that the court must issue a **firearms relinquishment condition as part of the order of protection, if they have evidence that a perpetrator of domestic violence is in possession of firearms.**
- Requires that if an order of protection requires a perpetrator of domestic violence to vacate their residence, they cannot stay at a residence where they have easy access to firearms.

Section 4: Prohibited Persons

- Adds people subject to relief from abuse orders to Vermont's list of prohibited persons (people who cannot purchase or possess firearms).
- Ensures that **while a protective order is in effect, individuals subject to the order cannot purchase or possess firearms**, and that doing so could be the basis for a criminal violation.
- Currently, people subject to final relief from abuse orders are prohibited from purchase or possession by federal law. This change would codify and expand this protection to emergency orders in Vermont statute.

No one can remove themselves from sexual or domestic harm, no one can thrive or take care of their children, and no one can heal and be full members of our community if they are murdered by a partner or family member with a gun. One life lost is too many when we know we can protect ourselves from gun violence through common sense gun laws. I urge you to pass H.610, and continue to fight for these crucial sections of the legislation so that we can keep our friends, neighbors, and family members safe.