

Testimony in Opposition to Firearm Purchase Waiting Period in S.169

Dear House Judiciary Committee Members,

Psychologists and psychiatrists assess whether a person is suicidal, a danger to themselves, based on whether the person has a detailed plan to kill themselves and the means with which to accomplish it. Neither, by itself, is sufficient. The person is questioned in depth. Saying they're going to shoot themselves is not an indicator of suicidal risk, unless their plan includes, for example, the particular firearm they're planning to use, where, when and how they're planning to use it, alone or with others, have they discussed their plan with anyone. They must also have means: access to a firearm, a combination to a safe, access to ammunition, money to purchase a firearm and/or ammunition, etc. Secondary gain is also assessed, who else will be affected by the suicide, who will be harmed, what statement is being made, what message is being sent, if any. Great care is taken when assessing suicidality. Is this person at risk of taking their life; because if not, will I improperly take their freedom? For guidance is the important and basic tenet physicians learn early in their training: to "first do no harm".

It is exceedingly rare for a person to commit suicide without first having made detailed plans. They may put a plan on hold, then pick it back up at a later time, but it does not come to fruition without planning and consideration. Mandating a waiting period by law, before the purchase of a firearm, is placing a requirement the suicide has already met. It's not a deterrent. The suicide accomplishes their goal, if not now, then later. Those not truly suicidal do not die, also deliberately.

The proposed waiting period legislation will impact ONLY law abiding Vermonters and would not be expected to reduce suicides!

In the tragic case of Andrew Black and his family who ask in Andrew's obituary for "cooling off" legislation to prevent suicide, there are many questions and few facts known.

<https://vtdigger.org/2018/12/21/parents-calling-gun-waiting-period-say-efforts-wont-end-obituary/>

It is understandable the family would like some good to come from their loss. The question is whether any good would come from their request. We know imposing a waiting period on firearm purchasing puts some people at risk, those at risk of imminent deadly violence would be prevented from meaningful and effective self defense mechanisms. Further, they'd lose the deterrent effect of firearm possession, often effective without having to fire a shot.

The family refuses to reveal details of Andrew's state of mind or what led to his suicide. Without analyzing these and many other currently unexplored factors, one can not understand what might have prompted this young man to take his life nor what measures might have reduced the chance of that happening. The grieving family is in pain, may feel some guilt, and is using the power and broad scope of Statewide legislation and media attention to self soothe.

Included in the analysis would be the question of why Andrew chose to use a firearm? He spent considerable money to purchase the hand gun he used to kill himself, instead of choosing a method which was without additional financial expenditure. He already owned a firearm. His father kept firearms in the family home, locked. This suggests that the parents were concerned about Andrew's state of mind, that he might have posed a danger to himself. Apparently, these concerns persisted

between Andrew and his parents for some period of time before Andrew took his life, likely far exceeding any waiting period a legislature might seek to impose. Additionally, Andrew brought the weapon into and killed himself in the family home. This choice makes a very big statement! He left no explanatory note. Another meaningful piece to the puzzle. The family understands some of the picture, but will not share with the public. Instead, they wish to impose restrictions on all Vermonters, though Andrew's case may be specific only to himself and to his family. There may be no valid generalization that can be drawn from his actions which are applicable to anyone else. Without a forensic psychological examination of Andrew's behavior, statements, social media writings, notes, conversations, etc, we're just guessing. That's not a basis for writing restrictive anti-selfdefense legislation.

Neither the case of Andrew Black, nor suicide data, provide a compelling reason to knowingly endanger those at imminent risk of mortal danger, certain domestic violence victims, for example, by preventing them from purchasing self defense firearms in their time of need and requiring instead an intentional and significant delay! I encourage you to reconsider the wisdom of this legislation as it is likely to do harm but very unlikely to do any good.

Respectfully,

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