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## **Testimony in support of S.169 – An act relating to firearms procedures**

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Vermont has a higher than average rate of suicide deaths. Our rate of youth suicide deaths consistently place us in the top quartile in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>

Means matter. Among all age groups, firearms are the most common method used in suicide death in Vermont. In the 18 and younger age group, about half of the suicide deaths are due to firearms.<sup>1</sup>

Vermont has higher than average youth suicide death rate when compared to other states but lower than average prevalence rate of youth reporting severe depressive symptoms, suicidal planning, and suicide attempts<sup>2,3</sup>.

Differences across states in the rates of youth suicide deaths are largely explained by variations in household gun ownership<sup>2</sup>.

90% of those who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to later die by suicide<sup>4</sup>.

Many suicide attempts occur with little planning during a short-term crisis.

Adolescent and young adult survivors of nearly-lethal suicide attempts were asked how much time elapsed from the moment they decided to attempt suicide to when the attempt occurred. 24% said less than 5 minutes and an additional 50% said less than 1 hour<sup>5</sup>.

Those who attempt suicide impulsively are more likely to choose a violent method and are less likely to have a history of depression than those who use other methods<sup>5,9</sup>.

Firearms are the most lethal means of suicide. Over 90% of firearm suicide attempts result in death<sup>6</sup>.

Restriction of highly lethal means can lead to fewer suicide deaths due to delay or substitution of less lethal means<sup>7</sup>.

VPR report looking at death certificates of firearm suicides in Vermont from 2011-2016 show 63% (n=234) used handguns and 36% (n=133) used long guns<sup>8</sup>.

No single intervention will solve the problem of gun violence. However, requirement of a waiting period to purchase firearms help to address the proven connection between impulsivity, access to firearms and suicide. The link between impulsivity, access to firearms, temporary crises and suicide deaths are well-described in the medical literature. National physician organizations have reported on this link and **recommend enacting waiting periods** to guard against impulsive acts including the **American Academy of Pediatrics** (64,000 pediatrician members), the **American College of Physicians** (154,000 internal medicine physicians) and the **American Medical Association** (240,000 physicians).

Here in Vermont, the **Vermont Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics**, representing over 200 Vermont Pediatricians, and the **Vermont Medical Society**, representing over 2,000 Vermont physicians, support the passage of a waiting period to purchase firearms as an important component in the effort to reduce gun violence in our state.

### References

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More about impulsivity, lethality of method and suicide from Harvard School of Public Health can be found here: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>