



March 13th, 2019

Senate Judiciary Committee: Firearm Sales Waiting Period (S. 22)

Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director

Thank you for taking testimony this morning on S. 22, which will establish a waiting period for firearms sales in Vermont. The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence in our state. The Vermont Network represents 15 Member Organizations throughout the state which provide advocacy and support to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Together, these organizations served 8,550 individuals last year in Vermont. On behalf of our members and the victims they serve, the Vermont Network strongly support S. 22.

There is a deadly relationship between firearms and domestic violence. Firearms are often used to threaten or intimidate victims, and research indicates that firearms are the most frequently used weapons in domestic violence homicides.¹ Vermont is not immune to this reality. Over half of all homicides in Vermont are domestic violence related. Of those homicides, 55% of those crimes have been committed with firearms. In cases of murder-suicides, the relationship to firearms is even more stark. Of the domestic violence related murder-suicides committed in Vermont, 77% were committed with firearms.²

Contrary to common misperceptions, access to firearms does not increase victim safety – in fact, proximity to firearms increases the risk of lethality for victims of domestic violence. Firearms are rarely used for self-defense in violence crimes such as domestic violence. Based on an analysis of FBI data from 2007-2011, victims of violence crime engaged in self-protective behaviors that involved a firearm in less than 1% of cases³. In fact, when firearms are present in a home (whether owned by an abusive partner or by a victim), a victim of domestic violence is six times more likely to be killed. According to a study conducted by the Violence Policy Center, women are far more likely to be killed than to use a firearm in a justifiable homicide. For every one time a woman used a handgun to kill someone in self-defense, 83 women were murdered by their intimate partner with a firearm.⁴

Domestic violence related homicides forever change the lives of surviving family members and the communities in which they occur. S. 22 is one way to reduce the likelihood of impulsive acts of devastating violence. We thank the committee for your consideration, and for all of your efforts to advance policies that increase safety for victims of crime.

¹ Cooper, A., & Smith, E. (2011, November). Homicide Trends In The United States, 1980-2008. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics

² Vermont Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission Report, 2018

³ Violence Policy Center. (2013, April). Firearm Justifiable Homicides and Non-Fatal Self-Defense Gun Use: An Analysis of Federal Bureau of Investigation and National Crime Victimization Survey Data. Washington, DC

⁴ Violence Policy Center. (2001). A Deadly Myth: Women, Handguns, and Self-Defense. Washington, DC.