

**TESTIMONY OF CLAI LASHER-SOMMERS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – GUNSENSE VERMONT**

**BEFORE
SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
February 28, 2019**

Chair Sears and members of the Committee, my name is Clai Lasher-Sommers. I am the Executive Director for GunSense Vermont.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. GunSense Vermont is a growing coalition of concerned citizens—gun owners, non-gun owners, Democrats, Republicans, Progressives, Independents, and more—who understand that there is no other threat to public safety in the United States that looms as large as gun violence. GunSense Vermont advocates for gun safety legislation and other measures that will keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them.

On behalf of Gun Sense Vermont, I am here today to urge the committee to support S. 22. Waiting periods help reduce the occurrence of suicides and other impulsive acts of violence. Firearm suicide makes up the majority of gun deaths each year. Half of all suicides in the U.S. are carried out with a firearm. 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. When compared to other means of attempting suicide, guns are by far the most lethal. Most people who attempt suicide do not die - unless they use a gun. Across all suicide attempts not involving a firearm, less

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than 5 percent will result in death.¹ But for gun suicides, those statistics are flipped: approximately 85 percent of gun suicide attempts end in death.² This fact is incredibly important because the vast majority of all those who survive a suicide attempt go on to live out their lives and do not subsequently die by suicide. A reduction in suicide attempts by firearm would result in an overall decline in the suicide rate.

It's often said that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Waiting periods may help prevent firearm suicides by delaying access to firearms. In delaying immediate access to a firearm, waiting periods insert a buffer between impulse and action, and are essential in providing that time. Time for someone to rethink what they are about to do. Time for them to reach out to someone and get help. Time that every parent who has lost a child to suicide wishes they had been given. Time for a parent or family member to notice the signs. Time for law enforcement to complete a thorough background check. Studies show that policies that create this buffer are associated with reduced rates of firearm suicide.³

¹ Miller M, Azrael D, Barber C. Suicide mortality in the United States: The importance of attending to method in understanding population-level disparities in the burden of suicide. *Annual Review of Public Health*. 2012; 33: 393-408.

² Owens D, Horrocks J, House A. Fatal and non-fatal repetition of self-harm: Systematic review. *British Journal of Psychiatry*. 2002; 181: 193-199.

³ Luca M, Malhotra D, Poliquin C. Handgun waiting periods reduce gun deaths. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*. 2017; 114(46): 12162-12165.; Anestis

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According to the Giffords Law Center, states with waiting period laws for gun purchases have lower rates of suicide. Research published in the American Journal of Public Health showed that states with waiting period laws had 51% fewer firearm suicides and a 27% lower overall suicide rate than states without such laws.¹² When South Dakota repealed its 48-hour waiting period for handgun purchases in 2009, overall suicides the following year increased by 7.6%.¹³

I am here today to ask that you all to support S. 22. Waiting periods are overwhelmingly supported by the public and effective in reducing gun violence and the incidents of suicide and attempted suicide by firearm. I'm grateful that today in Vermont we have the opportunity to pass lifesaving legislation.

MD, Anestis JC, Butterworth SE. Handgun legislation and changes in statewide overall suicide rates. American Journal of Public Health. 2017; 107(4): 579-581.