

Good morning Representatives, my name is Eric Davis, and I am the president of Gun Owners of Vermont, an all-volunteer, non-profit group dedicated to the preservation of the right to keep and bear arms. I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to speak on this bill today.

Obviously, we all expected this bill to be taken up this year and judging by the speed at which it was amended and put on the agenda it appears poised to pass regardless of any objections we might raise.

I spent a lot of time since last year rehashing the Senate committee hearings over and over in my head wondering what I might possibly have done different to convince the Senators that this bill is not only unnecessary, but downright dangerous for hospital staff and patients.

One instance stuck out to me and that is when Senator Sears asked me “why anyone would need to bring a gun to a hospital?” That probably sounds pretty straightforward to the casual observer as that’s the argument for everything these days: “why do you NEED xyz???” I admittedly stumbled on the question a little myself, but after much consideration I think viewing this bill from that perspective shortcuts the greater issue at hand.

The Bill of Rights guarantees individual freedom by virtue of the fact that “rights” are spelled out in the negative connotation, e.g., one has “rights” AGAINST law. “Congress shall make no law...” “The right of the people shall not be infringed” etc. Now, I’m admittedly no constitutional scholar but this sort of basic understanding of the concept of law and rights suggests that a method of legislation where every solution to every perceived problem is to curtail the freedom of peaceful people, and then demanding that these same people show a legitimate NEED to retain those freedoms, is fundamentally at odds with a system of governance designed to protect us from excessive law.

At the crux of this issue is a very basic and critical question that should be objectively considered by everyone. It’s the question that I should have put to Senator Sears last year when he asked me why anyone needs to bring a gun to the hospital, and the question is this:

Is your life worth protecting? And if the answer is “yes”, then whose job is it to protect you? The supreme court on multiple occasions has ruled that the police are under no legal obligation to protect anyone. Some hospitals employ private security, which is somewhat reassuring if not for the fact that these people go armed with a flashlight, a can of pepper spray, and the one weapon known to send shivers up the spines of aspiring mass murderers: a cell phone to call the police, who will, well, anyhow....

Is your life valuable to you? Chances are that if you find yourself in a hospital, seeking advice and treatment for your health and wellbeing, then the answer should be a resounding “yes.” When confronted with disease and injury, we attempt to preserve ourselves, why is it then, that when confronted with evil, we seek to abdicate our most basic duties of self-preservation to agents of the state, -or worse- to the belief that criminals will obey sign proclaiming this area to be a gun free zone?

So, to directly answer the Senator’s question (which I now realize was, and is somewhat rhetorical), the kind of person who carries a gun in a hospital is the kind of person that values their gift of life and is willing to protect it. It’s the person that realizes they are ultimately responsible for their own safety and accepts that responsibility. It’s the kind of person who realizes posting signs advertising that self-defense has been made a criminal act, is an invitation to the worst kind of horrors that our society has to offer. And it’s the kind of person who just might quietly accept that society has made them a criminal for the simple act of being prepared; and then discreetly go about their business. Prepared as always.

We believe that self-defense is a human right and that any sacrificial compromise of that right to some perceived greater good remains immoral and unethical. We continue to oppose this bill.

Thank you.

Eric Davis
President, Gun Owners of Vermont