

Gun Owners of Vermont

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Eric Davis, and I am the President of Gun Owners of Vermont. We are an all-volunteer, non-profit advocacy group dedicated to the preservation of the right to keep and bear arms.

We appreciate the allotted time of 30 minutes for our speakers today, but unfortunately, since we are a volunteer organization and do not employ paid lobbyists, it seems we are somewhat short on witnesses. Most of the folks who we represent and who would normally take the time to participate in a public hearing could not arrange on short notice to get time off during a workday so they could testify. I will be giving the sole testimony for Gun Owners of Vermont on their behalf.

We consider ourselves a grassroots advocacy group and we feel that we represent all people who support Article 16 and the Second Amendment. We ask humbly for a small donation each year from our official members, but we like to think that we represent ALL gun owners in the Green Mountain State and not just those who can afford to pay for a membership. We very firmly believe that the right to keep and bear arms is for ALL peaceful individuals regardless of race, religion, place of birth, social status, net worth or other differences; in short, the right to keep and bear arms is a human right.

When we got word that we would be testifying on short notice in an unconventional format, we realized that our usual methods of having a large number of our members (or member-lobbyists as we like to think of them) testify in their own words would likely not be practical in this setting. We took to the coms to ask our folks to submit testimony to the committee via email in their own words and I asked specifically for folks who don't feel comfortable composing something to reach out to me directly and I would try to convey their concerns to the committee during my time here today.

In my last testimony, I highlighted the two different types of people who carry a gun: the person who carries aggressively with malicious intent, and the person who carries defensively as a precaution. In my testimony today I will do my best to give the committee the perspective

of not only the person who carries for protection, but also all of those gun owners who elect not to carry their firearms on a daily basis, and even those who do not own a gun but are concerned with the unrelenting efforts by those in government who propose to restrict civil rights. Today I will be speaking for all of them.

Guns are an important and vital part of American culture whether anyone likes it or not. The people of this country place a high value on their right to acquire a gun as a utilitarian tool, a sporting device, a piece of history, a means of deterrence and protection, and many other combinations of reasons, as did those who authored our founding documents. It is no surprise that in a country born of violent, political revolution, and founded on the principles of protecting individual rights from oppressive government, that firearms remain an integral and crucial part of our society today.

Indeed, the firearm is seen as a symbol of independence by those who choose to own one. It is something to be safely kept, maintained, and respected; and it is something that is not likely to be surrendered easily because those who fear guns succeed in outlawing the possession and carriage of devices now owned legally.

While gun rights advocates may seem particularly stubborn and unrelenting, we feel like we are the ones who continue to get the raw end of the deal. Gun owners have been told -not asked- to “compromise” by accepting progressively more malicious, ineffective, and sometimes downright dangerous restrictions on their rights for almost 100 years now with nothing in return. We are constantly berated with buzzwords and empty platitudes suggesting that every successive set of restrictions is simply another necessary “common sense safety measure” or “reasonable restriction.”

As the latest rounds of legislation are introduced each year, with an emphasis on tightening any restrictions possible, we are condescendingly assured that “no one is trying to take your guns.” These bills are proposed constantly and by the dozens, yet we see few if any proposals to restore individual rights, and zero acceptance of the idea that any previous restrictions might have been excessive and should be repealed.

Ignoring the myriad of Federal laws passed since 1934 and the countless restrictions and outright bans on certain classes of firearms and accessories by unconstitutional bureaucratic and executive action, we would point out that in 2013, the author of S.30 has [proposed legislation which outlawed firearms in common use](#) from law-abiding people.

When we point out that this never seems to stop, and that gun control has historically been a one-way street, and for a government that “isn’t trying to take your guns” it sure does seem like you are trying to take our guns, we are admonished as paranoid, and branded as “extremists.”

It has been suggested that this bill was drafted in response to incidents in which so called extremists have protested government overreach in certain public places while openly carrying firearms. We would point out that this sort of posturing has never been a popular tactic of the gun culture and in fact has been historically frowned upon. It has only increased recently with the calls for more gun control.

We have seen massive protests for numerous reasons in this country over the last several years. The people who protest for gun rights do so for the same reason as people who protest the government over any other issue: They feel like their government is not working for them, and in many cases, is actively working against them. When they feel that their concerns are not only being ignored, but openly dismissed, they understandably become more acrimonious. When the thing that they are protesting continues to occur, the tensions increase, and the situation escalates.

When we put the question to our membership of what message they wanted us to convey to the committee, we received many responses, some broad and generalized and others narrowly focused. They came from many people of many different backgrounds and occupations and offered many different angles of view on the current state of gun rights in Vermont but there was one clear and omnipresent theme in the underlying tone of all the responses we received, and that was one of frustration.

Frustration that in a year of unprecedented events and civil unrest; a year when Americans have suffered through global pandemic and financial hardships; a year that has seen us shackled with previously unimaginable restrictions on life and liberty, that the legislature’s priority is once again gun control.

In a year that has seen over 20 million Americans come to the realization that [the system cannot and will not protect them](#); and have chosen to hedge their bets against the uncertainty of a deeply troubled society by acquiring and carrying a firearm for their own safety, they find the only thing they can count on for sure is that come January, when the legislature reconvenes, there will be renewed calls to restrict their right to make that decision.

These people feel bullied and attacked by a government which repeatedly bludgeons them with new restrictions on what was once a proud and independent lifestyle. They realize that no amount of gun control will ever be enough to satisfy those who advocate it, and whatever small restrictions are being pushed this year will ALWAYS be a steppingstone to more restrictions next year. The absolute proof of this can be observed simply by looking at the number of anti-gun bills proposed over the last ten years versus legislation that protects the right to keep and bear arms. We then feel insulted as gun control lobbyists and legislators alike pontificate that these restrictions are for our own safety, as if we are too stupid to know what is good for us.

William R. Tonso might have best summed up the feeling in his 1990 book *The Gun Culture and its Enemies* when he stated: "I find it rather ironic and somewhat amusing as well as intimidating, that many 'enlightened' people who righteously condemn ethnic and religious 'prejudices' readily display similar 'prejudice' toward another category of people to which I belong – gun enthusiasts."

Upon requesting our members' opinions on S.30, the one detail specific response that we received more than any other was the observation that this bill -or more importantly the idea behind this bill- relies entirely on the good faith of all participants. Regardless of the proposed penalty for violation, the only mechanism S.30 provides to keep people safe is to put up a sign that reads "No Guns Allowed" and hope everyone follows the rules.

It seems the author of this bill has envisioned some fantasy scenario -presumably in Vermont- where hospitals, childcare centers, and municipal buildings who are being terrorized by gun-brandishing political extremists, might have these dissidents heroically escorted out of the building -presumably by people without guns- and tried for their crimes against humanity on the back of this new law.

In reality what will happen is the same thing that happens every time gun control is passed: peaceful people get stripped of their right to the security and deterrence guaranteed by the Second Amendment and Article 16.

Gun-free zones have been proven to attract people seeking to inflict as much harm on as many people as possible. By removing the ability of good people to defend themselves, you remove the deterrence for bad people to do harm. Gun-free zones are dangerous and should not be expanded under any circumstances; rather, they should be abolished entirely.

When we consider this bill by itself, we have serious concerns. When we consider this bill being pushed simultaneously with another bill, S.63, that prohibits resource officers in schools and

thus ensures that only an on-duty law enforcement officer would be able to legally respond to a school shooting, our concerns grow more fervent, and we are left contemplating if the true motive of this legislation is actually to keep people safe.

There is another important and specific conversation to be had regarding the grey and often blurry area where property rights and constitutional rights overlap. Does a property owner have a right to ask that a person check their Second Amendment rights at the door? If the answer to that question is “yes” should the owners or managers of the property, then be held liable for the safety of the people within their area of operations? Furthermore, should the owners and operators not be required to provide some sort of armed security as they are arbitrarily depriving the individual of the ability to provide for their own safety? And finally, should there be a different precedent for private property than for public property and where do we draw that line on places like hospitals which are privately owned yet frequented by the public?

These are all important questions to ask, and they require slow and deliberate consideration to be answered -if in fact they can be answered. The point is that the impetus for this bill is not to answer those questions but to attack the independence of Vermont gun culture by creating more laws to turn them into criminals for something that has never been a problem.

Lastly, regarding the specifics of S.30, we received a high volume of correspondence from folks asking us to convey their concerns with this bill and there were a wide variety of them. Some were specific as outlined above and some were very simplistic and concise, almost in the nature of a plea, i.e. “Why do you keep doing this to us?” and “Please stop.” It would be impossible today list every single submission and concern, but one in particular stood out and deserves specific mention.

This notable correspondence came from a person who works in the field of childcare and was reluctant to offer their opinion on the matter for fear of political retribution. I encouraged them to send their thoughts to the committee to which they politely declined but asked me if I could convey them during my testimony today with the assurance that I not give their name. Rather than paraphrasing, I will read directly from their letter as follows:

“I work as an elementary childcare provider and am also a gun owner who is an advocate for the right to armed, yet responsible, defense of oneself and one's civil liberties. I have struggled trying to reconcile the two in a country that has seen many tragedies happen at schools because of the actions of unstable and willfully harmful individuals. These events are random and unpredictable. The only truly foolproof way

of preventing them would be to have armed police or guards in every shop, every home, every street corner, and every building to stop any threat from taking the lives of others.

Not only is this incredibly unpractical, but it also goes against everything our country and way of life is based on. We are not a police state nor should we strive to be one, with constant surveillance and police presence. The trade off to all this is when we need them, though they react as quickly as they can, they don't show up immediately. The several minutes it takes from when a phone call is placed to when police arrive could be a matter of life and death, and those tasked with teaching our children should have the option to provide effective and efficient protection for the lives of the children they look after.

I feel if we are serious about protecting our children, we should have all options on the table, including providers directly intercepting and ending a threat. We have seen armed citizens time and again stop mass shooters before they are able to claim more victims in the store, church, or other location they have chosen to pray(sic) on. Again, I feel that if done in a safe and responsible manner, and approved by those running the facility, the physical means of providing that protection should be an available tool.”

This a poignant statement from someone who works directly with children, has obvious concerns for their safety and is willing to accept the fact that children need to be protected by more than just empty words on a sign proclaiming some area to be a “Gun Free Zone.” The fact that having the audacity to voice this simple opinion causes them to fear for their job, speaks volumes to the fact that the debate is rigged and that the proponents of gun control have little use for the discussion of ideas which don’t fit their narrative.

In conclusion, as should be obvious by now, we cannot and will not support this bill with its questionable intent in any form. Real solutions which actually keep people safe will never involve removing good people’s right to self-defense and deterrence.

We look forward to a day when we might be able to work with our legislature towards the goal of keeping people safe and not have to do so from a defensive position. We once again assert that the right to keep and bear arms -and everything implied therein- is a natural human right. We do not see gun rights as a left or right issue, rather we see them as a point of unity that SHOULD transcend partisan politics.

We would implore all interested parties to break from the approach of focusing on objects rather than individual wellbeing and specific actions or behaviors. We would point out that the traditional approach of going after guns and criminalizing those who peacefully possess them has resulted in thousands of federal, state, and local firearms regulations currently on the books in the United States. Considering this, we have to ask: If gun control has worked, why do we need more gun control every year? And furthermore, if gun control has not worked, why would we assume that more gun control would work this time?

S.30 at best is a solution in search of a problem, it's gun control for the sake of gun control. At worst it is a deliberate and obligatory continuation of the openly hostile assault on Vermont's gun culture and its tradition of independence. An objective observer might note that stripping a motivated and independent people of their dignity, and then rubbing their noses in it, has historically not been a unifying tactic. In fact, it only leads one way.

We would once again thank the committee for hearing from us today and respectfully ask that no more action be taken on this bill or any other that infringes upon the rights of honest Vermonters.

In Liberty,
Eric Davis
President
Gun Owners of Vermont
www.gunownersofvermont.org