

2/24/2021

Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: Testimony on S.30

Chairman Sears and Committee members,

Thank you so much for having me, I really appreciate the opportunity and all of the important work you all are doing.

My name is Iris Hsiang. I am a Junior at Essex High School, and one of the Leaders of the Vermont Students Demand Action Virtual Field Office.

I'm here today to testify on behalf of S.30, but also to emphasize the need to extend the prohibition to **grounds adjacent to** the Capitol and other government buildings, as those are usually the areas where protests take place. We would also want to prohibit firearms at **polling locations, vote counting facilities, and during demonstrations on public property**. Firearms should also be excluded from **buildings essential to the electoral process**.

I am not old enough to vote yet, but still I know how important a functional democracy is, as well as the ways that it is currently under threat.

The first time I testified was for a public hearing in front of the house judiciary in a hearing for s. 169. I was 15 and alone when before the hearing I was catcalled in the main hall of the statehouse by a man 3 times my size dressed in orange. I'm not sure if anyone heard, I'm not sure if anyone saw, but I know that when I was in line to testify I saw that man give me a disgusting smile, and chatted politely with my representative and it gave me a visceral feeling of fear. I proceeded to testify, but when I was going down the stairs another man in orange began berating me, I lost him as I went to the coat room to grab my jacket, but as I was nearing the house side exit he caught up with me again. He yelled at me, he cursed at me, and he followed me out of the building. He followed me for another 20 ft out of the building before slowing, and failing to keep up with my pace.

These incidents terrified me, but I held onto the fact that I knew they were not allowed to have firearms in the capitol building, though of course the same was not true once we were on capitol grounds. I was assured that they did not possess the means to instantaneously end my life in the Capitol building. But that same comfort is not currently afforded to many of the other public spaces in our state.

I was at a protest this summer when a man walked up to us. He had a long black semi-automatic rifle slung across his back, and a bullet proof vest on. And he brought extra magazines. To me that signaled that he came there intending to use the one in his gun, to me that signaled he had come here to kill, and to me that assured me that my life was in immediate danger and that I very well might not make it home. Although he did not shoot, he stayed there all day, occasionally going off and reappearing, to remind us that we were not safe. Reminding us that at any moment he could unleash a shower of bullets that would leave us injured or dead.

I believe in democracy so fundamentally that I put my life on the line for it. But I shouldn't have to. The riots on January 6th have revealed a lot about this country, and I hope we choose to learn and grow from it. During the capitol riots I saw men carrying the same guns, the same magazines, and the same stature and attitude of the man that came to intimidate us this summer. They went to the capitol to stop democracy and in order to prevent them from achieving this goal we must prevent future attacks of this nature.

Next time I work the polls I want to feel confident that no one will bring a gun in, and hold our democratic process hostage. Next time I testify in person, I want to have the assurance that as long as I am on capitol **grounds** I will not be attacked by someone armed.

Iris Hsiang
Essex High School Student