

2/24/2021

Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: Testimony on S.30

Chairman Sears and Committee members,

My name is Maddie Ahmadi, I am a sophomore at Essex High School, the founder, and leader of the Essex High School Students Demand Action group, and I also currently serve on the Students Demand Action National Advisory Board, where I strive to keep my community safe through gun violence prevention and advocate for common-sense gun legislation like the piece in front of us today.

Almost one year ago, I and the entire Essex High School Students Demand Action group entered the state capitol building to fight for multiple gun violence prevention bills. 3 months ago, many of the same members volunteered at our polling places to help support democracy in action. We must protect these opportunities. We must protect these freedoms.

One critical way that we can ensure the protection of our citizens and democracy is by eliminating the potential for armed intimidation tactics.

As reinforced by the deadly, seditious attack on the United States Capitol Building on January 6, armed extremists seeking to undermine our democratic institutions are a chronic and ongoing problem.

Data shows at least 85 instances of armed protesters and incidents involving guns at protests at state capitals from May through December 2020.<sup>1</sup> Vermont legislators have also received troubling emails in their inboxes related to the resolution they passed condemning the attack on the Capitol,<sup>2</sup> and we have seen other warning signs that extremism is growing here in Vermont.<sup>3</sup>

This bill is a proactive, sensible proposal that would make sure that my fellow students and I can access the halls of our democracy without the possibility of armed intimidation. People should

---

<sup>1</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety, "Ending Armed Assaults on Democracy," January 15, 2021, <https://everytown.org/report/ending-armed-assaults-on-democracy/>.

<sup>2</sup> Xander Landen, "Legislators Receive Dozens of Troubling Messages Following DC Riots," Vermont Digger, January 13, 2021, <https://vtdigger.org/2021/01/13/legislators-report-dozens-of-messages-to-police-following-d-c-riots/>.

<sup>3</sup> Alan J. Keays, "'Was a Great Time,' Says a Vermonter Who was Close to the Insurrection," *Vermont Digger*, January 13, 2021, <https://vtdigger.org/2021/01/13/was-a-great-time-says-a-vermonter-who-was-close-to-the-insurrection/>;

"Militia Training Site Terrifies Neighbors in West Pawlet," Vermont Digger, October 29, 2020, <https://vtdigger.org/2020/10/29/militia-training-site-terrifies-neighbors-in-west-pawlet/>; "Neighbor Seeks Stalking Order Against Slate Ridge Owner," *Vermont Digger*, January 14, 2021, <https://vtdigger.org/2021/01/14/neighbor-seeks-stalking-order-against-slate-ridge-owner/>.

not be afraid to enter government buildings. Allowing firearms creates fear, and it also creates legitimate danger.

This bill should also apply to all polling places and other locations essential to the electoral process. Whether it's your first or your tenth time voting you should not be influenced by the presence of a weapon.

Vermont's political conversation should not be held at the barrel of a gun. Especially in these times of division and rancor, the people of Vermont need the freedom to talk to each other and their lawmakers without fearing for their lives.

I hope students feel comfortable returning to the Vermont capitol to advocate when it is safe to do so, however, right now we aren't only facing the Covid-19 pandemic, but also the potential for armed danger. Students should feel safe using their voice--not afraid that it might be taken from them.

Maddie Ahmadi  
Essex High School Student