

2/24/2021

Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: Testimony on S.30

Chairman Sears and Committee members,

I am Merry Kay Shernock and I live in Northfield. Thank you for letting me speak to you today.

I have been a volunteer for gun violence prevention for years and part of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America even before the VT Chapter was established. I have four (4) grandchildren; one in California where my daughter teaches school, and three (3) right in Northfield where their father and mother are also active in the life of our community. I am a retired probation officer. I tell you all this about myself to support what I am about to say:

WE BELIEVE IN THE CONSTITUTION.

We support everyone having all their rights and blessings. We believe this bill does not challenge any part of the Constitution.

Instead, this bill would prohibit firearm possession in public buildings where essential government functions are taking place, in child care facilities, and in hospitals. We support this bill, particularly given the recent attack on the U.S. Capitol **and** the related threats of armed protests at state capitol buildings around the nation. **Armed extremism is not free speech--it is frightening and threatens the rest of us.**

However, we would advocate to extend firearm prohibition to **grounds adjacent to the capitol and other government buildings**, as those are usually the areas where protests take place, **and during demonstrations on public property.**

Additionally, as a justice of the peace in Northfield, I would like this bill to also prohibit firearms at **polling locations and vote counting facilities, and any other buildings essential to the electoral process.**

I have lived in Northfield since 1985. It is my seventh (7th) drivers license. Though I treasure the calm we have here, I am aware of the threat of extremism both in VT, now, and in other places that could spread to VT. I saw and heard the venomous threats thrown at Governor Scott when he signed gun safety legislation a few years ago. My neighbor, who is a legislator, has received troubling emails related to positions they have taken. . Another neighbor who works for the State of Vermont chose to work from home this week because right now there are no rules prohibiting firearms near that state government building. Very regularly the news media advise me of the episodes of violent extremism that have occurred in the places I have lived previously, or where loved ones are living now:

California and Oregon. Wisconsin and Minnesota. Virginia.

You have heard these stories too.

I support this bill as a grandmother because I want that extra zone of protection when my grandchildren and their friends go to childcare.

I support this bill as a mother because I want that extra zone of protection when I and my adult children, and my friends and neighbors, engage in lawful peaceful protest, as we frequently do. As a retired probation officer I know how impressionable many people can be and how quickly violence can erupt. I think we have been lucky, so far, to not see armed protests erupt here as they have in other states. But I am uncomfortable trusting in luck; I will feel a bit better with this legislation.

Governor Walz, a former history teacher and a member of the MN National Guard, is quoted as saying something that applies here. Walz notes that Minnesotans (like Vermonters!) have the constitutional right to carry firearms, but he also notes that guns do not belong in certain sensitive places. Governor Walz compared carrying a gun to the Capitol grounds, for example, to carrying a running chainsaw into McDonalds "it just doesn't belong."¹

I urge you to support S. 30.
Thank you.

Merry Shernock

Northfield VT

¹ "Gov. Walz on State of Emergency in Minnesota," Radio.com, January 15, 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/gov-walz-on-state-of-emergency-in-minnesota/ar-BB1cN3fW>.