

2/24/2021
Senate Judiciary Committee
Re: Testimony on S.30

Chairman Sears and Committee members,

Thank you Senator Sears for allowing me to speak today to the members of the Senate Judiciary committee. My name is Seton Mcilroy. I live in Woodstock with my husband and 2 kids. I serve on the Village Board of Trustees and am a volunteer with the Vermont chapter of Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. I am speaking today in support of S. 30, sponsored by Senator Baruth, which would prohibit firearm possession in certain public buildings, child care facilities, and hospitals.

I strongly support S.30. The presence of guns in these places makes us all less safe. Prohibiting guns in public buildings, including the State House, is extremely important, particularly given the recent attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6th and the related armed protests we've seen in state capitols around the country.

Vermont is not immune from the effects of this rise in extremism -- it exists here too, and continues to grow. A charter bus of more than 50 Vermonters went to D.C. for the "Stop the Steal" march¹, and one filmed people breaking into the Capitol, later calling it a "great time."² We've all also been following the stories regarding the Slate Ridge militia training facility in West Pawlet, which was ordered to temporarily cease operations last month by a judge³. Its members have used threats and armed intimidation to terrify and harass neighboring property owners.⁴ And most concerningly, the group's Facebook page invited followers last February to attend a town Select Board meeting with weapons and trauma kits.⁵

Vermont is an open carry state, which allows for carrying firearms visibly in public. This dangerous policy has been exploited by white supremacists and extremists to intimidate their opponents. One such individual, a self-described white supremacist, even challenged the restrictions on high-capacity magazines passed in 2018. Thankfully, he was unsuccessful, as the Vermont Superior Court upheld the law this past Friday.⁶

¹ Colin Flanders, "In Trump They Trust: Vermonters Bring Fresh Conspiracy Theories Back from DC," *Seven Days*, January 13, 2021, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/vermont/in-trump-they-trust-vermonters-bring-fresh-conspiracy-theories-back-from-dc/Content?oid=32094880>

² 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/>.

³ "Slate Ridge Temporarily Ordered to Stop Operating Training Facility," *Vermont Digger*, January 21, 2021, <https://vtdigger.org/2021/01/21/slate-ridge-temporarily-ordered-to-stop-operating-training-facility/>.

⁴ "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/>.

⁵ Ellen Barry, "A Bristling Standoff Rattles Gun-Friendly Vermont," *New York Times*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/23/us/vermont-gun-range-pawlet-zoning.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

⁶ Derek Brouwer, "Vermont Supreme Court Upholds Gun Magazine Limits," *Seven Days*, February 19, 2021, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/OffMessage/archives/2021/02/19/vermont-supreme-court-upholds-gun-magazine-limits>.

In 2018, when Governor Scott signed that legislation and other comprehensive gun safety bills into law, he was called a “traitor” and “liar” by Second Amendment demonstrators.⁷ Just last month, **Vermont legislators received troubling emails** in their inboxes related to the resolution they passed condemning the attack on the Capitol.⁸ As someone who has been involved in gun violence prevention advocacy for many years, I’ve personally been yelled at and insulted by people openly carrying handguns, rifles and tactical equipment.

Armed extremism is not free speech—it poses a danger to our democracy. Laws prohibiting guns in sensitive areas such as polling places and state houses help protect public safety, while allowing guns in these sensitive areas undermines it. **Fully addressing the dangers that armed extremism poses to the United States will require a whole host of strong gun violence prevention policies and other measures, including addressing hate in our country.** Vermont should eliminate armed intimidation from politics by prohibiting guns at the State House and other public government facilities, and we would urge that you consider expanding this bill to cover polling locations, vote counting locations, and other places essential to the functioning of our electoral process.

S. 30 offers a strong start to ensure that guns are kept out of our most sensitive places, and will help remove armed intimidation from our democratic process here in the Green Mountain state.

I urge you to support S. 30.

Thank you.

Seton Mcilroy
Woodstock, VT

⁷ April McCullum, “Gov. Scott Signs VT Gun Bills, Calling for Civility, as Protestors Yell ‘Traitor’,” *Burlington Free Press*, April 11, 2018, <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/politics/government/2018/04/11/vermont-gun-bills-governor-phil-scott-signs-laws-amid-protest/494166002/>.

⁸ 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/>.