

Vermont Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs
Testimony on H.314 – House Education Committee
3/1/2023

My name is Chris Bradley, and I am the President and Executive Director of the Vermont Federation of Sportsman's Clubs. If you are not previously aware of the VTFSC: We were formed back in 1875, and we formed to address the fact that White Tailed deer had been hunted to near extinction here in Vermont. We were successful in spearheading the re-introduction of White Tails, and as a result of that effort we helped to form what is now the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

The VTFSC is comprised of approximately 50 member clubs, with approximately 14,000 members.

We raise the following questions and concerns with this proposed change to [13 VSA §4004](#).

To begin, we are not aware of any situation that has occurred in Vermont where the existing wording of 13 VSA §4004 has failed us.

As currently written, §4004 does not allow any person to knowingly carry a firearm or a dangerous or deadly weapon within a school or on a school bus.

Further than that, §4004 does not allow a firearm or a dangerous or deadly weapon on any school property with the intent to injure another person.

That phrasing both protects our schools and our students, while also allowing for the constitutional right for a person to carry some means of self-defense, and it also allows for hunting on school property. This newly proposed language negates both.

In considering this bill, we ask a basic question: How much land are we talking about here? It is our thought that schools in Vermont own a great deal of property. Do we know what the total acreage is that is affected by this proposed law? We suspect it is substantial, especially when you consider schools like UVM and Middlebury (which this bill does not exempt) and the land owned by our local schools across Vermont.

If we do not know the amount of acreage affected, then we respectfully suggest that this bill be put on the wall until that very basic piece of information is obtained. To proceed without such information would simply not be in keeping with the deliberative process that Vermonters expect from their legislature.

In regards to hunting on school property: We know of no instances where hunting on school land compromised the safety of our schools or students.

Beyond this, the wording of this bill has the real potential of making honest and law-abiding citizens into criminals just for picking up their child from school or driving across school property while they inadvertently have some means of self-defense in their vehicle or on their person.

Last year, a Bill was created in the Senate that, as initially written, would have banned firearms in Government Buildings, Day Cares and Hospitals, even though there was already a law on the books that addressed that problem in a manner that was markedly better than what eventually passed ([13 VSA §3705](#)).

I mention this bill only because, as a result of testimony – Day Care people strongly advocated that they didn't need such a bill; that they already had a process to handle this that was working and working well, and they shared a deep concern that such a bill could make criminals out of parents who were there to pick up their children, but who also exercised their constitutional right of self-defense.

This was a huge concern for them, as the proposed law could absolutely create a situation where parents became criminals simply for stopping to pick their children up while they happened to be armed.

This same situation will unfold at schools, with parents becoming criminals simply by picking up their kids from school if they are either going to or coming from a hunting experience, or by simply exercising their unalienable right to self-defense by having a firearm when they have no intention whatsoever of harming anyone.

We understand that many people do not routinely carry a firearm for the self-defense of themselves and others. However, many people do, and they do so daily without the rest of us knowing that they carry, or how even how many people around them may be carrying.

We understand that the thought of people carrying firearms might make some people uneasy – but it is difficult for many of us to understand why someone would fear something that cannot be seen – and the fact that people can carry may well speak to why Vermont is consistently one of the safest states in the nation when it comes to both violent crime and property crime.

We understand the need to protect our schools and our students, and we believe that we have a very well-written law is already in place that addresses this that was amended just 5 years ago, and it was amended specifically in consideration of the Fair Haven incident.

This bill, while perhaps well-intentioned, does not and will not result in keeping our schools any safer. It does however have the effect of snaring completely innocent people who have no intentions to do harm, and it absolutely negatively effects hunting in Vermont.

We vigorously oppose this bill, and we will do whatever we can to stop its forward motion as written.