

March 14, 2023
House Committee on Judiciary
Eliza Doucet

Chair LaLonde and Members of the House Committee on Judiciary;

My name is Eliza Doucet, I'm a junior at Mt. Abraham Union High School and today I'm here representing GunSense Vermont, a 4,000-member advocacy organization committed to reducing gun violence.

First of all, thank you all for having me today. Listening to the voices of youth like myself is the only way to move forward toward a safer state.

To start off, I want to express my complete support for H.230. As you all know, H.230 would prevent suicides by implementing a waiting period following the transfer of firearms between owners and by requiring firearm owners in homes where children or at risk individuals can access them, to store these dangerous weapons locked and separated from ammunition.

Sometimes, people ask me about what lawmakers are doing to help the gun violence epidemic and how I feel about it. I want to be able to tell them that lawmakers in Vermont are doing the right thing and taking action to save lives. In the past, that wasn't the case but I hope that my presence here today is a starting point off of which change can happen.

Suicide prevention is essential everywhere, but especially in Vermont where, according to the Vermont Suicide Prevention Coalition, the rate of death by suicide has consistently been 30% higher than the national average over the past fifteen years. The past three years have been difficult for many Vermonters as we faced isolation, financial strain, loss, and increased stress due to COVID-19. These factors have been repeatedly linked to higher rates of depression and suicide, making it all the more important that we act now. Personally, I have suffered from depression for much of my life. My family does not own a firearm and I'm incredibly grateful for that because even when I feel as though I am on the verge of a crisis, I know that I am as safe as possible. I don't want to imagine what could have happened if I lived in a place with immediate access to firearms.

Thank you for considering this important bill. Vermont is currently the only state in New England without any sort of safe storage law and I am so grateful for everyone in this room who will vote in favor of H.230 and therefore in favor of saving lives.

For those who may not be planning on supporting this bill, I want to remind you that voting against it is voting against the protective measures for the constituents you were elected to protect. When you cast your vote, please remember my words and remember what is at stake here. H.230 isn't truly about guns. It's about saving lives while maintaining the freedoms and culture around safely used firearms that Vermont holds sacred.

Although I am grateful for and fully in support of H.230, I want to leave you with the thought that H.230 doesn't go far enough. H.230 doesn't mandate safe storage for all firearm owners so adults who may have not been identified as high risk, or who may have never before experienced a mental health crisis but find themselves in one at present, can access firearms. Furthermore, H.230 only requires a period of 72 hours between the transfer of firearms between owners which means that an extended mental health crisis could still easily end in death.

So to finish off, I want to urge you to keep fighting for what is right no matter how many of your colleagues might push back. Please join me on the right side of history. Thank you.