



March 30, 2023

Chair Lalonde and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I serve as Counsel for Everytown for Gun Safety where I'm responsible for supporting state legislative efforts in Vermont. Everytown is the largest gun violence prevention organization in the country, with over 10 million supporters including moms, mayors, survivors, gun owners, veterans, and everyday Americans fighting for public safety measures that can help save lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on S.3. We are grateful for your consideration of this important legislation that would prohibit providing training or assembling with a group for paramilitary training activities if the person reasonably should know the training would be used to further unlawful civil disorder. Vermont is one of only five states without a law prohibiting either for-profit militias or paramilitary activities. S.3 would help bring Vermont in line with the vast majority of the country at a particularly salient moment.

The United States faces a dangerous threat from armed extremism, often involving the promotion of white supremacist ideologies. Extremists have participated in anti-government militias or other armed groups seeking to perpetrate violence, spread conspiracies, traffic in hate speech, and engage in armed intimidation.¹ Vermont has not been immune from this trend, most notably with the dangerous facility at Slate Ridge in West Pawlet that was used by gun-rights extremists affiliated with local militia and antigovernment groups as a location to train for "professional gunfighting" and other paramilitary training.² The owner of Slate Ridge repeatedly threatened and intimidated his neighbors, even asking followers of the group's Facebook page to find an SUV of the same make and model as the one owned by his neighbor's daughter to "shoot up and then blow up," and to attend a local Select Board meeting armed with weapons and trauma kits.³ This kind of conduct is irresponsible, dangerous, and completely inconsistent with Vermont's strong tradition of responsible gun ownership. It places all Vermonters at risk and jeopardizes Vermont's reputation as a welcoming and inclusive state.⁴

After years of litigation, the town of Pawlet was eventually able to force Slate Ridge to shut down by taking them to Environmental Court for violations of local zoning regulations.⁵ It took so long because when the concerns around Slate Ridge first hit the news three years ago, state leaders said they "didn't have the legal tools to deal with the shooting range or the alleged

¹ Everytown for Gun Safety, "Armed Extremism," <https://www.everytown.org/issues/armed-extremism/>

² Emma Cotton, "Militia training site terrifies neighbors in West Pawlet," *VT Digger*, October 29, 2020, <https://bit.ly/40pdHLP>

³ Ellen Barry, "A Bristling Standoff Rattles Gun-Friendly Vermont," *The New York Times*, March 1, 2021, <https://nyti.ms/3IQITWq>

⁴ Michael Shank, "White extremism is winning in my Vermont town. I'm selling my animal sanctuary and moving," *USA Today*, August 2021, <https://bit.ly/3IXjfy7>

⁵ Emma Cotton, "Vermont Senate leader introduces bill that would ban paramilitary training camps," *VT Digger*, January 9, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3KfVn2f>



threats toward neighbors.”⁶ It took years of litigation to be able to obtain relief. This is not a viable long-term solution, as not all municipalities have applicable zoning laws and waiting years to shut down this kind of dangerous activity jeopardizes public safety. Vermont needs to have the tools to prevent paramilitary camps like Slate Ridge from operating in the first place in order to stop them from radicalizing and training more armed extremists in the future. S.3 will give the state that critical tool.

We strongly urge the Committee to pass this important bill. Enacting S.3 will demonstrate that Vermont is a place for everyone to feel safe and welcomed, not fertile ground for extremists to spread and weaponize their dangerous ideologies.

Sincerely,

Alison Shih
Counsel, Everytown for Gun Safety

⁶ “Judge orders Slate Ridge owner to remove buildings or go to prison,” TV 6, February 9, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3Zt7OMz>