



April 26, 2023

Chairman Lalonde and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Alison Shih and 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 more than 10 million supporters including moms, mayors, veterans, survivors, gun owners, and everyday Americans fighting for public safety measures that can help save lives. I want to thank you all for allowing me to testify in support of S.4.

I want to focus my remarks today on some specific provisions<sup>1</sup> in the bill that will help block illegal gun access at the point of sale and allocate funding to support community-based interventions that break the cycle of violence in the hardest-hit places.

First, this bill significantly strengthens Vermont's laws focused on ensuring guns are kept out of the wrong hands. It's simply common sense to ensure that people who are currently fugitives from justice and people subject to final domestic abuse- or stalking- related restraining orders are prohibited from purchasing or possessing firearms. Likewise, it's logical and prudent to ensure that people who are charged with carrying a dangerous weapon while committing a felony, drug trafficking, or human trafficking should be prohibited from purchasing or possessing a firearm.

I want to particularly highlight the importance of ensuring those subject to final stalking-related or domestic abuse-related restraining orders are prohibited from accessing firearms. When it comes to gun violence against women, the United States is the most dangerous country in the developed world. Women in the US are 28 times more likely to die from firearm homicide than women in other high-income countries.<sup>2</sup> While domestic abuse is not just borne by women, it is an epidemic that affects millions of women across the country, and guns in the hands of domestic abusers can turn abuse into murder. Indeed, the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation makes it five times more likely that the woman will be killed.<sup>3</sup> And incidents of stalking are of particular concern when it comes to the lethality of these criminal acts. A study of incidents in ten major US cities found that nearly 9 in 10 attempted murders of women involved at least one incident of stalking in the year prior to the attempted murder.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sec. 6. 13 V.S.A. § 4017a; Sec. 8. 13 V.S.A. § 4020a i; Sec. 9. 33 V.S.A. § 511; & Sec. 10. 20 V.S.A. chapter 209 §4671

<sup>2</sup> Everytown analysis of the most recent year of gun homicides by country (2015 to 2019), GunPolicy.org (accessed January 7, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, J. C. et al. "Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: results from a multisite case control study". American Journal of Public Health. (2003). <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.93.7.1089>

<sup>4</sup> Judith M. MacFarlane et al., "Stalking and Intimate Partner Femicide," *Homicide Studies* 3, no. 4 (1999): 300–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767999003004003>.



We know that common sense measures like those contained in S.4 can help. States that have restricted access to firearms by people under domestic violence restraining orders have seen a 10-13% reduction in intimate partner homicides.<sup>5</sup>

We strongly support the provisions of S.4 that would block access to guns by people who shouldn't have them, including fugitives from justice, people charged with particularly concerning offenses, and people subject to final domestic violence- and stalking-related restraining orders.

We are likewise grateful that this bill will help ensure that young people with dangerous histories are not able to purchase a firearm by facilitating the reporting of juvenile records to NICS, which will help Vermont comply with the enhanced federal background check now required under the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.

Lastly, but just as importantly, we're thrilled that this bill would create a Community Safety Grant Program for localities to support community programs, with corresponding appropriations included in the budgets proposed by Governor Scott and both chambers of the Legislature to fund it. And we particularly urge the support of community violence intervention programs, which are programs that address the full cycle of violence—from acute moments of crisis, to programming that serves to address root causes, to supporting the healing process of victims and survivors.

This comprehensive, community-based approach is particularly needed now. According to reports, in 2022 there were 25 homicides in Vermont.<sup>6</sup> That would be the highest number of homicides in more than 20 years, according to FBI data.<sup>7</sup> As Mayor Weinberger referenced before the Senate Judiciary Committee when they were considering S.4 earlier this year, Burlington alone saw more murders than in the previous four years combined, including numerous firearm homicides, as well as more than double the number of gunfire incidents than in 2020.<sup>8</sup> Both Vermont and the United States as a whole saw huge spikes in gun sales during the early part of the pandemic. As our communities continue to be flooded with more and more guns, it's more important than ever to invest in proactive solutions to disrupt conflicts before they escalate into gun violence.

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<sup>5</sup> April M. Zeoli et al., "Analysis of the Strength of Legal Firearms Restrictions for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Their Associations with Intimate Partner Homicide," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 187, no. 11 (November 2018): 2365–71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwy174>.

<sup>6</sup> Cam Smith, "Vt. homicide rate in '22 highest in nearly 3 decades," WCAX, <https://www.wcax.com/2023/01/11/vt-homicide-rate-22-highest-nearly-3-decades/>

<sup>7</sup> FBI National Incident-Based Reporting System, "Crime Data Explorer," <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/>, accessed February 2023

<sup>8</sup> Burlington Police Department, "Burlington Police Chief's Report," December 2022, <https://bit.ly/3wTSrB0>



The drivers of gun violence are complex and multifaceted. But the proposals in this bill that address gun violence represent an approach offering a range of proven solutions to support both prevention and intervention. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify in support of this important legislation. I am grateful for your efforts to address the epidemic of gun violence in Vermont.

Sincerely,

Alison Shih  
Counsel  
Everytown for Gun Safety