



Good morning and thank you for allowing to speak in support of this bill. First, I'd like to share some of my background and then I will tell you how this bill would bring some good to a very tragic and unnecessary event. (And I'll just apologize ahead of time for any emotions that show up...)

My name is Amy Stewart and I was born and raised in Dummerston, VT. My childhood was pretty great--growing up very close to my dad's veterinary practice, I was always around animals from a very early age--attending large animal calls with him as well as taking in strays. We freely roamed the woods around my parents 10 acres of land along with our dogs. This practice continued even after I moved to NH with a family of my own. My siblings and I always looked forward to taking our dogs back to VT to hike the trails and allow them to run free. My four children and my husband grew to love the time spent in VT as well. In 2015, we rescued Sadie as a 2-yr old black lab mix. Our children had wanted to get a dog for so long and we finally had the space to do so. Honestly, I was the last person to want a dog as I already had my hands full with 4 kids ranging from age 4 to 13 but she quickly became my best friend and therapy dog. She and I connected in a very special way.

On November 22, 2023, all of this changed. We all (17 of us and 3 dogs) traveled to VT for Thanksgiving as we do every year. Besides myself, my dad (Ron Veenema) was Sadie's other favorite person. She knew he was a sucker for her longing looks and she couldn't wait to get out and run in the woods. A little before 5pm they bundled up and headed out. It was a bit slippery as there was a couple inches of fresh snow on the ground, so I worried some about my dad -- and when I heard the front door open, I felt relief that they were back. But that

quickly changed. The next moments are imprinted in my brain--I hate how clearly I can remember it all. I heard my dad say, "I need help. Sadie's been shot." He told my mom to call the emergency vet in Deerfield, MA. I was in disbelief--how is this happening right now? Maybe it isn't too bad? My sister, my dad, my 16-yr old daughter and my 19-yr old niece ran down the hill in the darkness with a sled. When we got to Sadie, the wounds I could see were horrific and there was so much blood. She was still alive though, and our focus at that time was only to get her to some help. I know my dad wished he could bring her to his clinic 5 minutes away, but he had since retired and I think he already knew her injuries were too severe. We struggled to get her onto the sled and up the hill--it took everyone's strength as she wasn't a small dog. Finally in the back of my minivan, my dad drove and I crouched in the back with her. She struggled to breath, and I will never forget her eyes as they looked up at me. I tried to put pressure on the wounds but there was so much blood. I kept telling her to hold on, but she took her last breath just before we pulled into the vets. They rushed her back but ultimately her injuries from the bullets were just too much. We had to say goodbye. Walking out of that Vet office without my sweet Sadie was simply heartbreaking. And even now, I struggle to find the words to describe the emotions that followed.

The next several days were a blur as the details of all that happened came to light and we spent hours speaking with both the state police and Fish and game. It was very unusual for Sadie to venture over to the neighbor's property as she usually ran the trails in the woods in the other direction. But that night she was attracted to a bait station that was about 50 yards from my parents' property line--what dog, especially one with a strong prey instinct, can resist the smell of fresh meat? As Sadie followed her nose to the bait station and her curiosity got the better of her, my parents neighbor mistook her for a coyote and shot her. We were horrified to learn that what he was doing--shooting into the dark, from an open window in his house, was actually legal. Almost everyone we spoke to has said the same thing--how is that even legal? My dad was right there, not that far off. He will never forget her piercing cries when she was shot.

On Saturday, it was time to return to our home in NH. The family time that we looked forward to every year was coming to an end--but it didn't even feel like it had begun. We had to pack up all of Sadie's belongings and I had to listen to her crate that she slept in every night rattle in the back, empty. I turned onto our road where I walked her every single morning and burst into tears. I wanted to comfort my kids--they each were dealing with their own emotions, but I kept falling apart myself. It was so hard to adjust to a home without Sadie in it. And even now, over a year later, I still expect her to climb up on the couch to snuggle.

It is hard no matter what when you lose a pet, but the tragic way in which we lost Sadie never should have happened and could have been avoided. My parents have lived in VT for over 50 years, and they know and are friends with many hunters. So many of them reached out to say that what that man was doing was not hunting--simply killing. And it is the same with my husband's family. He grew up in northern Maine where many friends and family still hunt. This was not hunting. This man claimed to be killing coyotes to reduce their overall population, but we have read many studies stating that that practice only increases their population. The coyotes and other animals that are killed were not threatening any other animal or livestock. My parents' other neighbors are now frightened to be outside with their dogs.

I know there are many facts and scientific reasons that will be presented in support of this bill. I agree with all of them. But for me, and my family, the biggest reason that we would like to see this bill become a law is that we would be able to say that perhaps what happened to Sadie sparked some change. Perhaps some good can come out of our incredibly painful experience and other pets and pet owners could be spared from such tragic events.