

H.606 Testimony

My name is Hailley Hem, and I am from Williston. I am a daughter, a student at Champlain Valley Union High School, and a member of the State Youth Council. I am also a member of the Vermont chapter of Students Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, and we support H.606, which contains several important gun safety provisions.

Growing up, I lived in Long Beach, California. In the urban metropolitan, I would walk to school with my cousins and stop by the local liquor store before and after my classes. Despite the vision of sunny skies and warm beaches, my beloved community was, and still is, consumed by gun violence. Every night, I would hear the news anchor parading another death by gunpoint on the routes I would take to school and the sounds of gunshots fired occasionally in the dead of night. It hurts more knowing that gun violence disproportionately impacts historically marginalized communities like the beautiful, diverse city of my home. But even in my new home of Vermont, which seems like the polar opposite of the citified scapes of Long Beach, I still see the effects of gun violence, seemingly morphing and adapting to continue to plague a completely different part of my life. Issues that usually seem so foreign to our state have now become more apparent year after year. Through these experiences and countless more shared by my communities and me, I have seen firsthand how the gun violence in our country has shaped people. I joined my chapter of Students Demand Action so that no child or person feels unsafe in their own community.

H.606 is a sensible, life-saving gun safety bill that would ensure people who have been found by a court to be a danger to themselves or others because of mental illness cannot purchase or possess a firearm, it would ban machine guns and other rapid-fire devices, and hold the gun industry accountable. We are advocating for these policies because they make our communities safer and help reduce gun violence.

Decisions made in the boardrooms of gun companies have a direct impact on our safety. Gun companies can choose to be part of the solution when it comes to reducing gun violence by securing their supply chains to prevent gun trafficking, not engaging in dangerous marketing, and taking reasonable steps to ensure their products don't end up being used to commit crimes. H.606 is an important step in this direction and would require gun companies to take these common-sense steps to save lives.

If a gun company chooses reckless practices over public safety, they should be held accountable in court. Every other industry, from Big Pharma to tobacco to makers of ordinary consumer products, has to answer for the harm they cause, and the gun industry should be no exception, even though federal law has given them special protection. Survivors of gun violence deserve their day in court to seek the justice they're owed. We support H.606 and its provision that would empower survivors of gun violence and our state attorney general to hold the gun industry

accountable in court when it engages in business practices that harm our communities.

In Vermont, we're grateful that our state and local lawmakers have consistently prioritized gun safety in recent years. As a result of this progress, Vermont now has the 17th strongest gun safety laws in the country. But there's always more work to do to save lives. That is why I encourage you to vote yes on H.606.