



**S.109 – Firearm Surrender Order Compliance Working Group &
Marriage License Fee Sunset
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April 2, 2025**

Thank you for the invitation to testify on S.109, miscellaneous judiciary bill. My testimony will focus on Section 25, which creates a temporary Firearms Surrender Order Compliance Working Group, and a proposed addition to S.109 for the committee's consideration.

Firearms Surrender Order Compliance Working Group

Firearm injury is the leading cause of domestic violence homicide in Vermont. As a result, there are state and federal laws to protect victims when they are at risk of harm with a firearm. The intent of Section 25 of S.109 is not to expand beyond these current laws, but to better implement them.

Current state and federal law and related court conditions require that certain defendants surrender their firearms for various periods of time. In domestic violence cases, certain criminal defendants as well as those subject to final civil relief from abuse orders can be legally ordered to surrender firearms. However, currently, there is no uniform process for executing or monitoring those orders.

The 2024 Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission Report includes a recommendation to address these gaps, which stemmed from cases where there were legal firearms surrender orders, but the surrender process was either incomplete or compliance with those orders was not monitored.

As reflected in S.109, the Commission recommends that the legislature appoint a working group of key stakeholders to develop a uniform process to ensure compliance with court orders to surrender firearms and report its recommendations. The stakeholders would include law enforcement, federally licensed firearms dealers, victim advocates, and others with expertise in this area.

The goal of this working group is to ensure that current law is being implemented effectively and identify any barriers to its implementation.

Removing Marriage License Fee Sunset

We want to propose an addition to S.109, for the committee's consideration, which would remove a sunset on an increase to marriage license fees.

The Domestic and Sexual Violence Special Fund, established in 2008, is administered by the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services. It supports \$784,000 in expenses annually, which are distributed among Vermont's 15 community-based domestic and sexual violence service providers.

The revenues for the fund are currently comprised of a portion of two revenue sources – a surcharge on criminal and civil judgements and a portion of the surcharge on marriage licenses.

The revenues of the funds have been declining for many years. In part, this has been due to important criminal justice reform efforts. As a result, the legislature has needed to allocate one-time funds to prevent significant cuts in services.

In 2023, the legislature enacted a temporary 2-year increase in the surcharge on marriage licenses to help address the deficit. This surcharge is set to expire at the end of the fiscal year without legislative action. Language to repeal the sunset was included in this year's Budget Adjustment Act and H.6, sponsored by Chair Lalonde.

There is already a deficit in the Domestic and Sexual Violence Fund. If this increase were to sunset, it would worsen the deficit and risk critical domestic and sexual violence services.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with the committee today. I would be happy to answer any questions.