

Vermont Federation of Sportsman's Clubs

Waiting Periods for Firearm Ownership

The Vermont Federation of Sportsman's Clubs (VTFSC) fully understands the tragedy that a suicide represents as this scourge has touched many of us. We further understand that the primary reason of the establishment of a Waiting Period is to attempt to stop impulsive acts done with firearms, specifically suicide.

Due to the reasons outlined below, the Federation is strongly opposed to the establishment of any waiting periods for the purchase of firearms.

Suicide Is Primarily a Mental Health Issue

In 2016, and per the [Vermont Department of Mental Health](#) (VDMH), we know there were 200 hospitalizations and 823 emergency visits for intentional self-harm in Vermont. In addition to that number is the unknown number of less severe cases that may have been treated at a physician's office, an outpatient facility or by an EMT; and beyond that are the uncountable number who have suicidal thoughts or have depressive disorders.

Of the 1,023 self-harm attempts in 2016, VDMH reported that only 1% were related to firearms with 99% related to other means. For the period 2014-2015, VDMH reported that there were 222 suicides, 52% of which were caused by firearms with 48% accomplished by other means.

Establishing a Waiting Period will not address 99% of Suicide attempts, it will not address 48% of suicide deaths, it does nothing for all of the others in distress, and it will not lower the overall suicide rate.

Studies Do Not Prove That Waiting Periods Work

While there are studies which appear to show that Waiting Period Laws have reduced firearm-related suicides, these studies typically also show that waiting periods do not result in any lowering of the overall suicide rate - meaning that people in distress will find another method.

According to a 2020 study, the [Rand Corporation](#) concluded: "*Evidence that waiting periods may reduce total suicides is limited, and evidence that waiting periods may reduce firearm suicides is moderate.*"

Terminal Diseases

Vermont has a "Death With Dignity" law, or what could be called a "Doctor-Assisted Suicide" statute. This law outlines a process through which a person who has a terminal illness can be legally and medically assisted with suicide.

For that process to occur, not one but two doctors must be involved (not all doctors will participate), as well as two non-heirs, thereby making a non-private process for a very private decision.

At present, we do not know how many suicides occur in Vermont when the person opted to pursue death of their own free will due to a terminal affliction, but we know it to be a significant percentage of suicides. Therefore, the percentage of suicides in Vermont involving firearms is actually much lower than is stated.

People Plan

In the vast majority of suicides: The person involved had contemplated suicide previously, and in most cases a "plan" is formulated. When a person makes sure they have the necessary funds, arranges transportation to a gun store, selects a firearm, masks any distress they may be feeling with the FFL while identifying themselves and filling out the necessary paperwork, purchases the firearm and ammunition, goes back home and then ends their life with it: That's a plan.

In the face of a plan, a X day waiting period is defeated on X day + 1.

Exceptionally Rare Events

As we have seen, a tragedy such as what recently occurred in VT (a firearm was purchased and then used to commit suicide within a relatively short time period): That sort of story will get a great deal of media attention. Yet: Such stories are exceptionally rare.

In point of fact: Virtually all suicide attempts with firearms, as well as suicide deaths by firearm, are done with firearms that were already owned, rendering a waiting period useless.

The Greater Tragedy

According to the [Judiciary Annual Statistical Report](#), there were 3,380 Relief From Abuse (RFA) filings in 2018, an increase of 8% over 2017. Temporary Restraining Orders were granted for 2,636 cases and Final Orders were granted for 1,589. There can be no question that there are Vermonters who are in fear of violence, and it is clear there are thousands.

There should likewise be no question that ALL Vermonters have a Right to Self Defense.

Those who file for Relief From Abuse or Restraining Orders may live in fear for their lives. These people also plan. These filings constitute a plan for Life, a mechanism asking the court to help them save their own lives. Those at greater risk, needing additional backup protection may well wish to obtain a firearm. How ironic that a waiting period some would impose, ineffective at preventing suicide, would deny that person life saving protection in their most terrifying time of need.

It is not unrealistic to believe that Vermonters under the threat of violence may choose to immediately obtain the means for defense. As documented by a study authorized under the Obama administration which was handled by the CDC: The defensive use of firearm is a "[Common Occurrence](#)" and it makes sense that many Vermonters may wish to immediately prepare for defense, especially when facing emergencies and social breakdowns.

It is a huge tragedy when a person chooses to end their life.

As unfathomable and tragic as that loss is, we believe it to be a far greater tragedy if a person very much wanted to live, but ended up being killed because they were legally prevented from obtaining the best means of defense in a expedient and immediate manner: **Due to a law designed to save lives.**