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Hello, I'm Ed Cutler, the president of Gun Owners of Vermont.

My organization and I, stand in opposition to all parts of S.31, but I will only focus on the "mental health" portion of the bill today.

To begin with, no one wants to see anyone hurt or murdered by ANY means.

Acts of violence to oneself or others is abhorrent to all Vermonters.

Will S.31 section 3 be able to help or hinder what this committee is trying to do?

We believe it will hinder this committee's goals by not addressing the underlying problems of mental health.

Mental illness is a curable condition and if S.31 passes it will stigmatize these people forever.

According to the NICS database<sup>1</sup> as of January 31, 2015, there are 3.8 MILLION "prohibited persons" labeled as "Adjudicated" for mental illness.

We find this disproportionately large as there are only 1.9 million convicted felons.

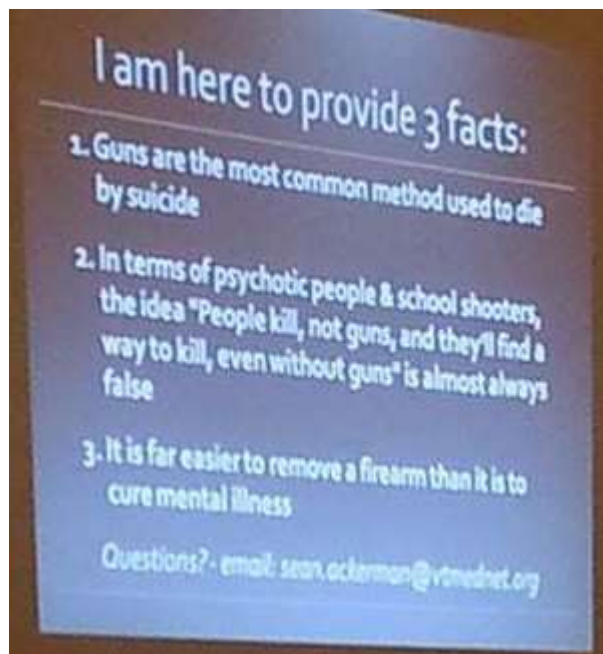
<b>January 31, 2015 Active Records in the NICS Index</b>		
Rank	Prohibited Category Description	Total
1	Illegal/Unlawful Alien	6,365,599
2	<b>Adjudicated Mental Health</b>	<b>3,806,621</b>
3	Convicted of a crime punishable by more than one year or a misdemeanor punishable by more than two years	1,897,139
4	Fugitive from Justice	471,491

Some of these people on the prohibited list are the 89,000 veterans who returned home from Desert Storm and sought counselling at the Veteran's Administration<sup>1</sup>. The names of these soldiers were included by using "mentally incompetent" in addition to the term "mental defective." These cases were NOT adjudicated but are still on the federal ban list.

Are we to believe that there are really THAT many dangerous and violent people in this country?

Who determines which persons are a danger to themselves or others?

Psychiatrists are called into court as “expert” witnesses and the court relies PRIMARILY on their testimony.



There are currently psychiatrists in the state of Vermont that have made public statements that nobody should own firearms.

To quote Dr. Sean Ackerman from the November 11, 2013 public hearing on the proposed Burlington firearm bans,

**“It is far easier to remove a firearm than it is to cure mental illness.”**

Are we to believe that mental health professionals like Dr. Ackerman are going to be truly objective and not report his patients to the state as a “danger to themselves or others” when in reality they are not?

According to the psychiatrists we have talked to, the actual number of truly violent people with mental illness are miniscule.

We are including a link to a video where Dr. Robert Emmons<sup>2</sup> explains that if a bill like S.31 passes, it will have OPPOSITE effect and those that need treatment will not seek help because of their fear of losing their Rights under Article 16 of the Vermont Constitution.

On page 8 of the report prepared for the Vermont Department of Mental Health by The Center for Health and Learning titled, *Reducing Suicide Risk by Limiting Access to Lethal Means*<sup>3</sup>, that passing S.31 will have the exact negative effect as Dr. Emmons explained in the video!

“It is important to note that gun owners in particular may have a perceived added disincentive to seek help for depression or other mental health concerns, due to a high concern over the federal statute and additional state laws that prohibit purchase and ownership by individuals deemed mentally ill.”

A common treatable form of mental illness is depression. Many times it is a TEMPORARY condition, however, records on the federal database are forever.

We strongly suggest that you shelve S.31 entirely and instead follow the guidelines proposed under the report *Reducing Suicide Risk by Limiting Access to Lethal Means*, Pgs. 31-34 Section IV RECOMMENDATIONS.

“[T]he fact is that a large proportion of Vermont’s population most at risk for suicide by gunshot already owns a firearm”

“The report concludes that **creative approaches building on the existing connectedness, responsibility, and safety-conscious mindset of the gun-owning community**, coupled with efforts to **de-stigmatize help-seeking and promote open communication about depression and other mood disorders, may be more effective at preventing suicide by gunshot in Vermont.**”

“Vermont’s many cultural and geographic parallels with New Hampshire, the state that has so successfully implemented the **Gun Shop Project**, bodes well for similar efforts here.”

“Therefore, the primary recommendation of this research is to capitalize and build upon the existence of New Hampshire’s Gun Shop Project, and to model Vermont’s forward movement on the New Hampshire format.”

“Two essential components of success are **collaboration with the gun-owning community from the very start**, and **respectful interaction with the gun-owning community** utilizing the language and comfort zone of community individuals.”

Why is the “gun-owning community” NEVER part of writing legislation, while the “anti-gun community” continually writes bills on a subject they know nothing about?

**We need education and counseling, NOT legislation!**

References:

1. **Table:** Active Records in the NICS Index (table): [http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/nics/reports/active\\_records\\_in\\_the\\_nics-index.pdf](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/nics/reports/active_records_in_the_nics-index.pdf)
2. **Video:** Jan 24, 2015: Vermonters for Liberty meeting with Dr. Emmons, <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/57946930/highlight/601781>
3. **Report:** *Reducing Suicide Risk by Limiting Access to Lethal Means: Impact of Firearms & Other Lethal Means on Suicidal Individuals*, October 2014, Prepared for the Vermont Department of Mental Health by **The Center for Health and Learning:** <http://gunownersofvermont.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Vermont-Dept-of-Health-Reducing-Suicide-Risk-by-Limiting-Access-to-Lethal-Means.pdf>
4. **Article:** Veterans Gun Seizure Hoax Debunked...Somewhat (updated): <http://www.veterantoday.com/2013/02/25/veterans-gun-seizure-hoax-debunked-somewhat/>