

## **Testimony in Support of House Bill No. 7636**

**Hearing Date: April 8, 2026**

**Professor Fredrick Vars**

Good morning. My name is Fredrick Vars. I'm a law professor at the University of Alabama (writing in my personal capacity). Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 7636, which would establish a voluntary do-not-sell firearms list. I want to start with a true story.

- Donna Nathan bought a handgun and used it the same day to commit suicide.
- Donna had been battling depression, with the help of a loving family.
- In the months leading up to her suicide, she had repeatedly and voluntarily admitted herself to a hospital for psychiatric treatment.
- In doing so, she gave up nearly all her liberty trying to get better, but she could not give up her ability to buy a gun.
- Donna hated guns, but that's what a Google search on her phone showed was the most effective tool for the job, right before it showed the closest gun shop.
- Katrina Brees, Donna's daughter, believes that her mother would have signed up to prevent her own gun purchase and would still be alive today.

Suicide claimed the lives of 112 Rhode Island residents in 2023. Roughly a third of those deaths involved a firearm. Gun suicides get less attention than mass shootings, but, nationally, they outnumber all types of gun homicide by thousands of victims. Our veterans are among the hardest hit.

House Bill 7636 would reduce this tragic death toll by allowing people who fear suicide to put distance between themselves and firearms. If passed, the bill would allow anyone to voluntarily and confidentially suspend their OWN ability to purchase firearms. There are two options: either a temporary suspension with automatic removal after 180 days, or an indefinite option with removal upon request after 90 days.

The bill does not infringe on anyone's Second Amendment rights. No one is forced to participate and no one's firearms will be taken away. In a public opinion survey, a majority *of gun owners* supported the measure.

This modest proposal has already been adopted in five politically and geographically diverse states: Washington, Virginia, Utah, Delaware, and Colorado. A dozen states all over the country considered similar bills in one year alone. A national version was introduced in Congress on a *bipartisan* basis.

We know that this voluntary delay period has the potential to save many lives based on three well-established facts:

- (1) Suicide is very often impulsive.
- (2) Firearms are by far the deadliest common method. There are rarely second chances.
- (3) Only 10% of people who survive one serious suicide attempt keep trying until they succeed. Ninety percent choose life.

Thousands of people want this option, including me. I have bipolar disorder. I've been suicidal. I want to sign up. An alarming 15% of people with bipolar disorder die by suicide. If I had had easy access to a gun at certain points in my life, I might already be one of them.

People who have never been severely depressed cannot understand what it's like. You lose joy, you lose hope, and you lose the ability to make rational decisions. However, like almost all people with mental illness, I have periods of clarity. During these periods, I want to protect myself and my family against future dark days.

I am not alone in wanting to sign up. I anonymously surveyed 200 people receiving psychiatric care at a major medical center in the South. Nearly half (46%) of this high-risk population said they'd sign up for a proposal like House Bill 7636.

Please support House Bill 7636. Help us help ourselves.