

Speech before the Fairfax County Delegation – January 5,  
2008

Good Afternoon, I want to thank you to taking the time out of your busy schedule just before you journey to Richmond to begin this year's legislative session and too give us citizens an opportunity to express our hopes, desires and point of view.

I want to speak to you as a resident of the Westfield High School community whose children have witnessed, been victimized and murdered by gun violence beyond rational comprehension over the past 18 months.

We had two police officers killed, just for the simple fact that they got up that morning and put on a uniform to protect and serve us. Then, just over eleven months later, the unthinkable tragedy took place at Virginia Tech. This is a day that we will never forget - the loss of Reema Samaha and Erin Peterson, just two of over thirty victims. Our family knew both Reema and Erin. Our oldest played soccer with Reema in SYA, attended St. Timothy's and Westfield High School. With Erin, it was soccer from third grade to high school, then basketball in high school at Westfield. We spent many weekends on the sidelines with Erin's parents, Celeste and Grafton, cheering our children and watching them both grow into beautiful young women.

With both tragic events, there were two common elements: first, a breakdown in the mental health field and lackluster gun laws that allow guns to be lawfully put into these sick individual hands. While it can be argued that in the first case the guns were purchased illegally, that was really closing the barn door well after the horses got out.

In this year's session, I'm asking that all of you take the time and effort to think and act on what you as a legislative body can do to help prevent these types of acts in the future. While many will say it is a mental health issue, others will say it's a gun issue, when in fact it is a combination of the two.

How can someone who has been either committed to a mental health facility or been declared by a judge to be mentally harmful to themselves have unrestricted access to guns?

I will not stand here and tell you what the answers are today; I only ask that you go in with a fresh perspective on what can and should be done.

It is clear that the Commonwealth severely understaffed and under funded the mental health field in many areas.

I do strongly believe we do need to close the gun show loop hole, have more extensive background checks and even go so far as to research the environment on where the guns will be kept and clearly link the mental health condition of a person buying and using guns.

I find it ironic that in Virginia it is easier to buy a handgun than it is to adopt a cat from the local pet store. Does that make any sense to anyone here?