

Friday, January 17, 2008  
MPPH Committee Hearing  
General Assembly Building  
Richmond, VA

My name is Joe Samaha, a citizen of Virginia for 52 years. I am the father of Reema Samaha, who was a citizen of Virginia for 18 years. Reema was killed at Virginia Tech nine months ago, yesterday. I can tell you that 9 months seems like 9 days. The tragedy of April 16 could have been prevented. The dots can be connected.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, on that day (April 16) Virginia made history. But not in a good way. We boast about top honors in business environment. We boast about top honors in education. Yet, we can least boast about our standard of public safety. You, as our legislators, can't. Because their remains a blemish that is visible. As long as you leave one knowing opportunity available to a felon, person adjudged mentally ill, a terrorist, or a person under a restraining order, to have free access to a gun at a gun show without a background check, then you have not done your best. Then you have not done your fiduciary duty to your constituents or your fellow Virginians.

Private gun sellers should not be allowed to sell guns without background checks at gun shows. This issue is bipartisan. This is a Virginia issue, not urban or rural issue. *This public safety issue is for those that own guns legally and those that don't own one.* Passing either of these Bills will help protect and preserve our culture by taking us one step closer to keeping the weapon from the element that should not have one.

I can then only assume that if you vote this Bill down today, that you only serve your own self interest and not that of your constituents.

I leave you this morning with one last thought. It came from a blogger who poo pood the idea of a background check at a gun show as a “*nuisance*”.

-Let me tell you about the *nuisance* of hearing the news reports of shootings at Virginia Tech on April 16, when I woke up.

-Let me tell you of the *nuisance* of calling Reema on her cell phone multiple times only to get no answer. My heart pounding harder with each non-response.

-Let me tell you of the *nuisance* of speeding down I81 for 4 hours with a knot in my stomach anticipating the worst fear any parent could endure.

-Let me tell you of the *nuisance* of a total stranger walking up to me at VT informing me that, “Reema did not make it”.

-Let me tell you about the *nuisance* of waiting four chaotic days for the identification and release of Reema’s body.

-Let me tell you about the *nuisance* of the funeral arrangements; the viewing; the memorials; the burial.

-Let me tell you about the *nuisance* of our weekly visits to the “crying field” at National Memorial Cemetery.

-Let me tell you of the *nuisance* of all the therapy sessions that family, friends, the VT and Blacksburg communities attend; left distraught and broken by this preventable tragedy.

-Let me tell you of the *nuisance* of the broken hearts and the ripple effect this tragedy had throughout our state and nation.

Imagine that. This fellow was complaining about waiting a few minutes for a background check.