

First, I ask respectfully that you listen to me and everyone here with an open mind.

My name is Lori Haas. I live here in Richmond. My daughter Emily was in French Class at VT the morning of 4/16. By the grace of God and one half an inch she survived the two bullets that grazed the back of her head. But sadly, so many, many did not survive that day. My husband and I recently learned that Cho shot 62 times in her class - I could describe for you in great detail more of what went on in that classroom that day, but you would find it much too painful, but it would only be a mere, insignificant fraction of the pain suffered by those whose loved ones were murdered that day. Please don't say they were "lost". They weren't lost. They were killed with a gun by a sick person who shouldn't have had a gun.

I could go on for hours with many, many gut wrenching stories of that day, the weeks after, the months after, so many heartaches, so much indescribable agony and I'm only aware of a very miniscule part of the anguish these families have endured. Just two nights ago on the phone, I cried again with the mother of one of the victims. Their heartache will never, ever end. But YOU may be able to prevent someone else that anguish - it could be your friend, neighbor or loved one who faces a gunman - don't think it won't ever happen to you - every family involved in the massacre at VT thought the same thing.

Sadly, many people in the state of Virginia know their heartache - the violent murder of a loved one by an individual who shouldn't be allowed to own or purchase a gun - murders on our streets, the clerk at the late night gas station or convenience store, the child killed by a stray bullet in a drug deal gone bad; the innocent driver or bystander in a drive-by shooting; injuries and killings that happen everyday across this commonwealth - caused by those that law has determined should not be allowed to own or purchase a gun; who did purchase that gun at a gun show from an unlicensed dealer to avoid the background check.

And yet, you are here today to consider whether you can support a bill that would help stem the flow of guns to some of the very people who cause these deaths and injuries - I've tried to put my emotions aside and determine why you can't support these bills - I really can't wrap my brain around any plausible reason that you could give me for not supporting this bill. My husband, daughter, two sons, friends, neighbors and extended family from all walks of life; all ages; all backgrounds; some from rural areas; some from suburban and urban areas; hunters, fisherman, lawyers, builders, retailers, self-employed, unemployed, landowners, they all support background checks and most of them are Republicans!

It's a mere five minutes (at the most) for a background check when buying a gun. I know because I've done it myself - I bought a rifle to target shoot with my sons and husband. We can wait two hours at DMV - we can certainly wait five minutes for a background check. These bills do not preclude you or I from selling to our family or neighbors. It applies to gun shows.

Who really are you protecting when you won't support background checks at gun shows - not law abiding citizens. Why then would you choose to support and protect someone deemed ineligible to buy a gun, when the law says they cannot.

As a matter of law, the government is responsible for public safety - lawmakers such as yourselves deem it necessary to regulate many dangerous substances for the health and well being of the public: prescription drugs, alcohol; dangerous dogs; automobiles even. Why would you shy away from supporting a law that can save lives? Can you not see the value in protecting innocent lives? It is your job and responsibility to do so.

I can't quote numbers - I don't know how many lives will be saved if you support these bills. But, I suspect it would be many. But, I can tell you - if you can save even one life with the passage of these bills, save even just one family the pain and suffering of dealing with death - your time and energy this session on behalf of the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia will be well worth it.

I pray I don't come this close to any nightmare ever again - and it has been a nightmare for all involved in the Tragedy. I pray daily for these families. I pray that my daughter heals emotionally and is able to live happily the life that we are so grateful was spared. And, I pray lawmakers, YOU, will do what it takes to protect others from these nightmares that guns in the wrong hands cause.