

Speech before the Fairfax County delegation – January 5, 2008

My name is Omar Samaha, I am a Virginia Tech Alumna, the brother of Reema Samaha and friend of Erin Peterson, both of whom were killed in Norris Hall on April 16<sup>th</sup> 2007. The gunman at Virginia Tech skipped one of my best friend's classes that morning to go shoot my sister Reema, my friend Erin, and many other innocent students and professors. He didn't stab them or hit them with baseball bats; he did the most convenient and quick thing people think about when they want to kill: He shot them with guns.

Guns: not knives, not baseball bats, not swords, but guns; Guns that he bought easily because of a loophole in our mental health system. Guns that can still be acquired through the gun show loophole. It's true that people kill people....but people with guns kill a lot more people and are much harder to stop.

This is the suit I wore to my sister's funeral. This is the only suit I wear now because everyday feels like a funeral to me. Everyday feels like that horrible April 16<sup>th</sup> day. What does everyday feel like to you? Do you wake up happy and ready to go, or do you wake up thinking about 32 innocent students and professors who were so full of life and love lying dead on a classroom floor? Are you haunted every waking and sleeping moment with images and thoughts of what those students went through? Do you see yourself in that classroom with them, watching them as they fall to the ground around you? Do you see yourself lying on the floor next to them, staring into their eyes as they die? That's just a taste of what we go through everyday.

You don't want that, but what are you going to do to prevent anything like this from happening again? The gun show loophole is still open, meaning there is still the opportunity, the potential, the possibility that this will happen again. Will you be involved in the next one? I never thought I would. Those 32 students and faculty didn't think they would.

When this happens again on your watch, you will be involved, and you will feel responsible, because you are in a position to make positive change for the greater good of mankind. You can make change so that you won't have to worry about your sons or daughters, those you love, or yourselves from ever experiencing anything that we have; things that I do not wish on my worst enemy.

I am not here for myself; to me, I've already lost everything. I'm here for you and everyone else. I'm here to tell you, you don't want this; you don't want anything that we have been through.

If you are afraid to speak up in fear of losing your political future, then what is the point of being elected? Isn't it more important when you look back on your life to know that you did the right thing for the good citizens of your state; what was good and just, and what you believed in? Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." Will you choose to speak up or will you choose to begin to die?