

STATEMENT OF PETER READ, FATHER OF VT VICTIM MARY READ,  
TO THE VIRGINIA STATE SENATE COURTS OF JUSTICE COMMITTEE

January 21, 2008

Senators, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. As many of you know, my name is Peter Read, father of VT shooting victim Mary Karen Read, a 2006 graduate of Annandale High School and one of the five outstanding young women shot to death by their fellow Fairfax County Public Schools graduate on April 16, 2007 on the Blacksburg campus. The loss of 32 innocent lives on that day, along with the wounding of 25 more and the mental and emotional traumatizing of countless others, compels me to speak to you today. You cannot imagine the sense of grief and loss the families and friends have endured and continue to endure, so I will not ask you to try. I will however, ask you to choose to address, from among the many important issues facing you in this session, those timely and compelling issues that could prevent or mitigate any such future tragedy in our Commonwealth. And make no mistake, these tragedies are preventable.

The recommendations of the Governor's Review Panel—all of them—are vital and should be implemented immediately at all levels. However, they are but the beginning of a much longer

and harder road we must travel to ensure—both literally and figuratively—a safer and saner Commonwealth. Passing into law the Governor's proposed changes to mental health and privacy statutes, along with the monetary resources to implement them, is critical. Please remember that these issues affect all of us, not just those afflicted with mental illness. Yet, in some respects, meeting this monumental challenge is the easier task. The harder task—the task which will require profiles in courage from each of you—relates to the ease with which the instruments of tragedy can be obtained and used in this Commonwealth by those who have no business owning, much less using, high-powered and lethal semi-automatic firearms. Close the gun-show loophole, allow our college and university presidents to determine whether to allow firearms on their campuses, and don't be dissuaded by issues of political expediency or difficulty. As a proud twenty-year veteran of the United States Air Force who has carried arms in the defense of our nation, I can assure you I have no "anti-gun" agenda—I have a "pro-life" agenda, in the most basic sense.

Mary and her fellow Hokies, both fallen and surviving, are counting on you to do the right thing—I hope and pray you do. God bless you, and thank you again for the opportunity to speak.