

From the VT Conference Gun Violence Prevention Task Force

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In 2020 there is a push in the Vermont Legislature to pass bills aimed at reducing Vermont's suicide rates. More than 100 people in Vermont take their own lives in most years. A person's decision to take their own life is a terribly tragic permanent solution to what may be a temporary problem or a solvable situation. It devastates families and communities; we can reduce these unnecessary deaths.

From the State of Vermont Department of Mental Health's website*:

"Vermont's rate of suicide, calculated as the number of deaths by suicide per 100,000 people, are higher than the national averages. Vermont rate of suicide are also higher than the rates of neighboring states and the New England Region. The overall rate for the past 10 years has been increasing. In the most recent years, more than a 100 Vermonters have died by suicide... Firearms are the method used for nearly two-thirds of the deaths by suicide."

The suicide reduction efforts focus on 3 areas:

- Waiting periods before being able to purchase a gun. Mental Health experts tell us that suicide is an impulsive act; and waiting periods will reduce the number of actual suicide attempts. Since suicide by using a gun is nearly always fatal, and suicide by other methods frequently isn't, a waiting period will increase the number of our friends and neighbors who survive an attempt and can access help.
- Rules to increase safe storage of guns. There is widespread agreement that firearms and ammunition in the home should be safely locked away. This will reduce attempted gun suicide by people under the age of 21 and other firearm accidents in Vermont homes.
- Improving Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) that allow weapons to be removed from people at risk to themselves and to others. The ERPO law that was passed 2 years ago has been used in every county of Vermont, however it's use has been restricted to family members and police. Expanding this law to include medical and mental health professionals will allow for interventions that will prevent suicide.

Getting gun safety legislation passed into law is an uphill struggle. Reducing suicide rates in Vermont is part of being our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Please contact your Vermont State Representatives and Senators and ask them to support these efforts.

If you are interesting in joining the VT Conference Task Force to Reduce Gun Violence please contact Christopher Ashley at: Cashley.NCC@gmail.com

*<https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/prevention-and-promotion/suicide-prevention>