

March 13, 2016

Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to hear and read testimony on so many important bills. I write today in strong support of two bills on your agenda: HB 5054, An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence; and SB 429 An Act Concerning Service of Restraining Orders. These two bills will achieve two important goals, which I also supported last year: 1) having sworn police officers make service of temporary restraining orders; and 2) removing firearms from subjects of temporary restraining orders pending a hearing to take place no more than 14 days later.

I lived in Sandy Hook for over 25 years. While I have recently moved to Meriden, it will always be the place I consider home. I attended Sandy Hook School as a student, and returned to student teach there in college. Sandy Hook has always been a special place to me – a place filled with happy memories, incredible people, and a strong sense of community. On December 14, 2012, the world came to know the town I was lucky enough to grow up in. That was probably the day most of you came to know Sandy Hook as well. The horrific tragedy that took place that day shattered our community. It shook us to our core. But I am proud of what the world saw in the days following December 14, because the community I have known and loved for so long stood up and showed our strength, our love, and our hope.

I had been involved in local politics and organizations since long before I could vote. I advocated for education budgets, and candidates who showed they cared about a quality education for every student. I will be the first to admit that the issue of gun violence prevention never crossed my mind. It wasn't a part of my life. I never could have imagined it would hit me here - in my beautiful, perfect, quaint hometown.

And then it did. On December 14, it became an issue to me. It hit home. And it hit hard.

On the days following December 14, signs appeared all over our community. They read, "We Are Sandy Hook. We Choose Love." It is a message we have rallied around for over 2 years, and it's the reason I write to you today. We cannot afford to let gun violence destroy one more childhood, one more life, one more family, or one more community. We cannot afford to keep waiting and hoping things get better. Day after day, we hear of another life taken too soon by gun violence. Loved ones are being taken too soon. This session, you have a chance to make a difference.

I know that some of you come from communities where gun violence is, sadly, a regular part of your lives. Others come from places that, like my hometown before 12/14, don't see this violence every day. Don't make Connecticut wait until it hits close to home for you before you do something. We can't wait anymore. Every life taken is one life too many.

Just under two years ago, I woke up to a text from one of my best friends – a friend who I sat in my first grade classroom with more than 20 years earlier. She had texted to tell me her

neighborhood was in lockdown. She lives in Oxford, in the neighborhood where Scott Gellatly entered his mother-in-law's home and shot and killed his wife, Lori. She had applied for a restraining order. He was supposed to surrender all his firearms under the order. The killing came a day before the court hearing on whether to extend the restraining order

These bills are an essential step to ensuring gun violence doesn't continue to take the lives of so many affected by domestic violence cases.

I know this issue isn't easy, and that there are a lot of loud voices in the debate. I ask you today to listen for the quiet voices – the voices of children, the voices of abused, the voices of mourning parents, grandparents and siblings, and the silence of those no longer with us to speak.

In Sandy Hook, we chose love. We choose to love through acts of kindness and generosity. We give hugs more often. We say good morning and genuinely ask how people are doing. Day by day, we move forward. With hope and love and kindness, we are recovering.

And because I so love my hometown, when I have a chance to stand up on this issue of gun violence, I do. I stand up and ask you to hear our story, to really listen, and do something to help make it better. Don't make anyone else suffer through this story. Now is the time to act. Choose love. And choose to make a difference.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Hemingway  
Meriden, CT