

Written testimony in support of HB 454, Campus Gun Ban

My name is Caitlin Czeh (Zay), I live in Farmville, Prince Edward County, Va. I am a Moms Demand Action Volunteer, and I am survivor of the April 16, 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech.

Here is my experience of that fateful day, and why I support HB454, campus gun ban.

It was a cold, crisp, Monday, April morning. It was much colder than it should have been for mid-April, and there were flurries in the air. I was on my way to work at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, covering an earlier shift for a colleague who was out. I was annoyed at the cold, and zoned out from working earlier, so I was running on autopilot.

Shortly after I opened our department, we were notified of a shooting on campus, in one of the residence halls, close to our building on the southside of campus. It was barely even 7:30 am and we were put on lockdown while law enforcement and university officials worked to determine the location of the shooter. Little did we know that this was only the beginning of that terrible day, and that we would be locked down until we were allowed to begin dismissing in small groups, after 4pm.

Some of things that I clearly remember from that day are frantic phone calls from my family, friends, and loved ones that day. When my dad was finally able to get through to my departmental phone, the moment he heard my voice he just sobbed uncontrollably. He didn't know if I was alive, or if I was on campus or where I would have been on campus. When I was able to leave, and turn my cell phone back on, I had many messages from my extended family-aunts, uncles, grandparents, and many friends. They started out frantic, trying to determine if I was safe and alive, or not. As the messages went on throughout the day, they turned to good-byes. The most gut-wrenching messages of lost hope, love, and good-bye. When I was able to return those calls, I was met with shrieks of released anxiety, shock, joy, and uncontrollable sobbing.

After I left work, I went to the campus ministry house, where I was a member and sat with students throughout the night, as we waited for the names of the deceased to be made public. It was a very long night.

That day didn't just leave us with bullet shaped holes in 32 of our classmates, colleagues, friends, and mentors, it left all of us with the invisible scars of gun violence. Many of us have struggled with survivor's guilt. For me, once the timeline came out, I realized that I had been driving past East Ambler Johnson, the residence hall where the first shootings took place, I struggled with, and still sometimes struggle with myself for being zoned out at 7 am on a Monday morning, on my way to work. I wracked my brain endlessly wondering if I could remember if I had seen or heard anything unusual on campus that morning. Did I notice anyone running on campus? If I had noticed, did it strike me as

peculiar or out of place? Did I hear anything? Why wasn't I paying more attention to my surroundings? What could I have done, if anything, in that moment to have averted the devastation of the day?

I cannot walk into any building or space without taking notice of escape routes, exits, places to hide, and how many people would be able to fit inside. Does anyone have mobility issues? Are there any heavy objects like a table that could be put in front of a door? I don't ask these questions because I've practiced lockdown drills, I ask because I've experienced gun violence on campus, firsthand.

Please remember the 32 Hokies who never left campus, and all those who have since succumbed to their injuries and scars-both visible and invisible, as you cast your vote.

Thank you for your time.