

From: Protect Minnesota Advocacy Fund <info@protectmn.org>
Subject: For Immediate Release: Open Letter to Republican State Senators

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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An Open Letter to Republican State Senators in Minnesota

From Rev. Nancy Nord Bence, Executive Director
Protect Minnesota Advocacy Fund

(Saint Paul) – Dear Senators,

There was another school shooting yesterday, in Colorado. And another a week ago, at UNC Charlotte. There has been a school shooting somewhere in American approximately every 12 days for the past year.

In Minnesota we've been lucky; none has occurred here recently. But when will our luck run out? And how "lucky" do the survivors in Red Lake feel, even 14 years later?

As Minnesota state senators, you have been elected to pass laws that will protect the health and safety of your constituents. You have the opportunity to do that now -- to save lives, maybe those of Minnesota students -- by passing the gun safety provisions included in the House Public Safety omnibus bill. Unfortunately, your caucus leadership has done everything in its power to prevent these measures from coming to a vote in the Senate.

Expanding Minnesota's current permit to purchase law to include criminal background checks on all sales of handguns and assault rifles is common-sense reform supported by nearly 90% of Minnesotans. Your constituents expect you to prevent these weapons from being purchased illegally. Although we often hear you say, "criminals don't obey the law," comprehensive background checks are effective because they don't apply to the criminals. They apply to private sellers, the vast majority of whom are law abiding.

Let me emphasize some aspects of the Criminal Background Check bill that you often seem to forget: This provision does not apply in any way to private sales of shot guns or hunting rifles. There is an exemption for giving or selling handguns and assault rifles to family members, including your grandchildren. There are also exemptions for collectors, law enforcement,

marksmanship and gun safety instructional programs, and for lending a handgun or assault rifle for temporary use by friends. Finally, because the proof of sale is held by the seller and the buyer ONLY, this measure would not and could not and will not create any sort of “registry” through which the government can confiscate your guns.

The Extreme Risk Protection Order provision, often called the “Red Flag” bill, is another life-saving measure that it is in your power to pass this session. Nearly 80% of Minnesota’s gun deaths are suicides. One Minnesotan dies by gun suicide every day, a shockingly large portion of whom are young. The rate of gun suicide in Minnesota reaches its highest peak between the ages of 15-25. Your vote for the Red Flag bill in Minnesota will help prevent these devastating tragedies by enabling law enforcement to temporarily remove firearms via court order from those who are at high risk. The bill is modeled on Minnesota’s current Domestic Violence Protection Order law and contains the exact same due process provisions. We haven’t heard complaining about lack of due process under that statute.

Red Flag laws do more than prevent suicides; they also prevent mass shootings. According to testimony in the Florida state legislature, the Parkland school shooting could have been prevented if there had been a Red Flag law in place. Florida law makers passed their Red Flag bill in record time after Parkland. Senators, are you waiting for a Parkland to happen in Minnesota before voting in these sensible and widely-supported gun reforms? How will you feel about obstructing the vote if Minnesota students are the next victims?

50% of Americans live in states that have comprehensive criminal background checks, and more than a third live in states with Red Flag laws. Their legislators have taken positive steps to strengthen gun laws without infringing on the rights of responsible, law abiding gun owners. Why won't you?

You have the power to save lives in Minnesota. On behalf of the children of Minnesota who may be the next targets, we urge our Republican state senators not to strip the gun safety provisions from the omnibus bill and to allow a vote on the floor this session. Stop hiding behind your caucus leadership and specious NRA arguments. Use the power the people have entrusted to you to protect Minnesota from gun violence.

After all, good luck only lasts so long.

Unarmed and unafraid.

Rev. Nancy Nord Bence, Executive Director
Protect Minnesota

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