

Dear Supporters,

Just over a year ago, the worst mass shooting in the history of our nation occurred right here in our beautiful Commonwealth at Virginia Tech. Since that tragedy, many of us have come together to remember and honor the families who lost loved ones that day. On April 16, 2008, on the one-year anniversary of the shootings, over 80 “Lie-Ins” were held across the country to protest weak laws that allow dangerous individuals to acquire firearms (the Lie-In movement was started after Virginia Tech by a Virginia mother, Abby Spangler). Four Lie-Ins took place in Virginia in Norfolk, Portsmouth, Richmond and Blacksburg (on the VT campus). Virginia Center for Public Safety (VACPS) members were proud to participate in several of them.

Our action in responding to the Virginia Tech tragedy began long before this anniversary, however, and I want to recap for you the good, the bad, and the ugly of the 2008 General Assembly session in Richmond, which concluded in March.

For the most part, VACPS was able to claim victory in its advocacy efforts. The mental health safety net was improved to prevent those who are disqualified under federal and state law from purchasing firearms. In a bipartisan effort, the General Assembly codified Governor Tim Kaine’s executive order to prevent those with mental health commitments from buying guns. The record-keeping process will also be streamlined and more mental histories will be included in the background check database.

The governor also helped us to defeat bills to allow concealed handguns in bars and the glove boxes of cars. Under pressure from the gun lobby, the 2008 General Assembly passed this legislation. It was promptly vetoed by the governor, who heeded the counsel of public safety advocates, the hospitality industry, and the Virginia State Police.



Lie-In in Richmond, Virginia, on April 16, 2008

Unfortunately, legislation to close the [Gun Show Loophole](#) failed to make it out of the Assembly, in spite of the recommendations of the Virginia Tech Review Panel, the passionate testimony of many of the VT families, and a January 2008 poll that indicated that universal background checks at guns shows were a top priority for a vast majority of Virginians (regardless of geography or party affiliation). It was obvious to those who observed the legislative process that the political powers that control the legislature were heavily influenced by the National Rifle Association.

The Gun Show Loophole issue has now been sent to the [Virginia State Crime Commission](#) for further study. VACPS will be vigilant in tracking the study in the commission. We will also continue to support the VT families in their efforts to keep guns out of dormitories and classrooms at Virginia colleges.

We hope you will continue to support us in our fight to prevent further shooting tragedies. Our opponents are well funded and believe that our common-sense approach is a threat to their campaign for unregulated access to guns. We need your help to prevail—the bottom line is that every right entails certain responsibilities on the part of the individual in order to protect public safety.

Bobbie Hart
VACPS President

VIRGINIA TECH SURVIVOR SPEAKS AT LIE-IN AT U.S. CAPITOL

On the one-year anniversary of the shootings at Virginia Tech, one of the survivors of the tragedy, Lily Habtu, addressed a group assembled at the U.S. Capitol for a Lie-In. The following is the text of her inspirational and moving [speech](#):

My name is Lily Habtu, and if you don't know my story, let me share it with you.

A year ago on this very day I was attacked in the safety of my classroom. I was a victim of gun violence, because a dangerous individual brought a gun onto a campus and changed my life forever.

I was shot not once, I was shot not twice, but I was shot three times . . . once in the head, once in the jaw and once in the wrist. I have to live with a bullet that will remain lodged one millimeter away from my brain stem.

My family and I have suffered immensely. My family watched helplessly while my body twisted in agony, screaming and crying out of sheer pain that I've never known could physically exist. Even with all the morphine, all the pain killers, I could feel the pain and I thought, "Is this why god saved me, so that I could wish that I had died on that floor peacefully so I wouldn't have to feel such pain?" And yet I am one of the lucky ones. Imagine what the families of the 32 victims are going through.

These are wounds that will always remain open, and with every shooting we relive these darkest, horrific moments of our lives. I will never truly heal from this tragedy. How does one truly heal when their sister, brother, father, mother, cousin, friend—any loved one—has their life stolen?



Lily Habtu speaks at U.S. Capitol on April 16, 2008

A bullet doesn't discriminate whose life it steals. A bullet doesn't discriminate whose family it will tear apart, whose homes will be destroyed. Why would you risk letting gun violence destroy your lives?

We have already suffered enough for all of America. Let our tears be enough, let our bloodshed be enough. What has happened to us we cannot change, but we have the opportunity to change our gun laws today to help prevent another Columbine, another Virginia Tech. When we sit around and do nothing, we allow our society to remain vulnerable and ourselves victims.

We can help prevent gun violence from reaching your homes, touching your lives, but we MUST all work together beginning right now so that another Virginia Tech tragedy does not happen.

What are we waiting for? Do we want to wait until another school shooting takes away 50 people at once? Will it take 100 victims all at once to make us become active in this effort to prevent more deaths? What we are dealing with here is the value of human life, and if you think that even one life is precious and worth saving from gun violence, then we know what we must do. We must force our Congress to act immediately. We need sensible gun laws NOW. We need to pass laws that will help prevent dangerous individuals from having access to guns.

Starting today, we will no longer remain silenced. We will make our voices be heard. We will no longer sit idly and do nothing. We need to tell Congress to pass federal laws to help keep us safe.

I am here today on behalf of all gun victims. We all need to be a living memorial and commit ourselves to fight for responsible gun laws. Let us start today.

CRIME COMMISSION TO STUDY GUN SHOWS

This summer, the Virginia State Crime Commission will be studying the issue of gun shows. The commission will be working with the State Police to determine if there is data on firearms that come from gun shows and are later used in crimes. Such data has been difficult to obtain because many firearm sales at gun shows are conducted without background checks (i.e., no paperwork). The commission will also compare the regulations on gun shows in Virginia with regulations in other states.

The commission's examination of gun shows is nothing new. It had previously been tasked with studying the issue in 2003 and accomplished little. Recent comments from the commission's new Chairman, Del. David B. Albo (R-Fairfax), however, have been encouraging. He recently [stated](#), "I'm not one of those Republicans who thinks this loophole... shouldn't be changed. I think every person who buys a gun should have a record check."

The next meeting of the Crime Commission will take place on September 9, 2008, at 9:30 AM in Senate Room A at the State Capitol in Richmond. We are hoping all VACPS supporters will plan to attend. **It is critical that we hold the members of the commission accountable**—their mission is to provide the Virginia legislature with sound data and an informed recommendation on how to address the Gun Show Loophole during the 2009 legislative session.



VACPS Government Relations Coordinator Alice Mountjoy speaks to the media at Portsmouth Lie-In.

If you have a chance to talk to your local elected officials about this issue, here are some helpful talking points on why closing the Gun Show Loophole would promote public safety:

- Under Virginia law, Federal Firearms Licensees are required to perform criminal background checks on individuals purchasing firearms. However, this law does not apply to individuals who make "occasional" gun sales as a "hobby." These "private sellers" can sell a firearm to anyone at a Virginia gun show—no questions asked.
- According to the Virginia State Police, between 22 and 35% of the firearms sellers at Virginia gun shows are private sellers. Private sales are "cash and carry," and leave no paper trail whatsoever. This enormous loophole allows convicted felons, domestic abusers, terrorists, mentally ill individuals and other prohibited purchasers to buy guns without drawing the attention of law enforcement.
- The Virginia Tech Review Panel has recommended that Virginia legislators close the Gun Show Loophole, stating, "In an age of widespread information technology, it should not be too difficult for anyone, including private sellers, to contact the Virginia Firearms Transaction Program for a background check that usually only takes minutes before transferring a firearm."
- Closing the Gun Show Loophole would not put gun shows out of business. When California enacted legislation to require all firearms purchasers at gun shows to undergo a background check, the shows continued to thrive. The situation is much the same in the 14 other states that have taken action to close the loophole.
- According to the ATF, gun shows are the second leading source of crime guns recovered in firearms trafficking investigations nationwide (behind only corrupt federally licensed dealers).

VACPS PARTICIPATES IN YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Hundreds of young people representing an array of communities from around the Commonwealth gathered at B. T. Washington High School in Norfolk, Virginia, on April 5, 2008, for the 11th Annual Hampton Roads Youth Leadership Conference.

The keynote speaker this year, Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA), discussed his “Youth Promise Act” legislation, H.R. 3896. The general session was followed by a series of breakout sessions which were designed and led by teens in collaboration with adult mentors, addressing topics such as cyber bullying, the effects of hip hop music, jobs and careers, etc. One of these breakout sessions focused on the topic of community, school and gang violence. VACPS Education Coordinator and the adult mentor for this session, Kaye Tice, said, “These young people need to have their voices heard so that adult leaders can understand the challenges they face and take action to offer support and resources.” Because so many potential solutions require funding and the support of elected officials, the youth will be compiling their suggestions to provide them to Governor Tim Kaine and Congressman Scott.

Governor Kaine closed the conference by encouraging young people to speak out at city council meetings (and other governing venues) about issues that concern them. He noted it is rare for elected leaders to hear the youth voice and they *do* pay attention when young people speak about their concerns and offer solutions.

The annual conference, sponsored by Hampton Roads Children of the Sun (HRCOTS) Athletic and Education Foundation, is focused on empowering youth to gather and explore issues of interest to them. VACPS is honored to have partnered with HRCOTS for many years around issues of youth empowerment and violence prevention.

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