

Colonel (Retired) W. Gerald Massengill  
Retired Superintendent of the Virginia State Police  
Chair of the Virginia Tech Mass Shooting Review Panel

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Closing the Gun Show Loophole

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you my thoughts regarding the issue of background checks at gun shows. Our General Assembly, in Virginia, has debated this issue for several years and although background checks are required only for licensed firearms dealers at gun shows in Virginia legislative efforts to require background checks of private sales seems to be looked upon more favorably each year but closing the loophole has not happen yet in Virginia. A gun can be legally bought from a private sale at a gun show in Virginia today with no questions as to your identity or background --- much like buying a candy bar in a candy store. It seems to me that commonsense tells us that such sales are not in the interest of the public safety. Virginians are, as am I, very passionate about their right to posses' firearms. Any law that affects the process of buying, selling or possessing firearms in Virginia will be viewed very cautiously by Virginians and its Legislature. However, polls show Virginians favor background checks at guns shows and closing the loophole.

A 37 year career with the Virginia State Police in law enforcement has convinced me that the adage "guns don't kill people-people do" is true and we, as a society, need to do all that reasonable and prudent to ensure firearms can not go, unabated, to felons and the adjudicated mentally ill. I have witnessed first hand the potential good, as well as the terrible harm and tragedy that came come from guns. I personally cherish the second amendment right afforded me to self protection and that of my family. I would not favor any process or law that infringed on law abiding citizens in their obtaining a firearm. However in this day of automation instant backgrounds check to determine a buyer's legal eligibility to posses a gun I view as a very reasonable public safety process and not a second amendment issue. Government requires all sorts of thing which are there to protect us in today's world, from telling how fast we can drive to how to cross a street. Background checks to buy a firearm, which takes normally just minutes, is one of those measures whose time has come to help ensure the public's safety with regards to the problem of gun violence, which injures and kills thousands of our people each year. Is there a link between gun laws and the movement of illegal guns in America? A report from the Mayors against illegal guns, shows there is such a link. Unfortunately , Virginia

is one of the higher "source states" highlighted in the study. Terms like "the iron pipe line" and the export of illegal guns to other states, as well as background checks for all sales at gun shows are examined in the study. Of particular interest is the report data that shows that "states that do not require background checks for all handgun sales at gun shows have an average crime gun export rate that is about twice the rate of states that do require such background checks". For me the finding and analysis of this report is not surprising. The report merely provides justification for commonsense gun laws.

On April 16, 2007 a lone gunman on the campus of Virginia Tech, after buying two handguns from firearms dealers murdered thirty two people, the majority of those killed were students who were to graduate in a few weeks. They had so very much to offer our Country and World. We will never know if a world leader or a cure for some terrible disease died that day. Thirty people killed in about nine minutes. The shooter had been adjudicated mentally ill by a special justice. The shooter was able to purchase his two handguns without rejection due to his name not being placed in the illegible data files of the State Police. This happen because the shooter was ordered by a special justice to receive out patience care for his mental illness. At the time of the shootings only those individuals ordered to receive in-patience care for mental illness were placed in the illegible files. Virginia's Governor and Attorney General, along with our Legislature promptly corrected this problem. Today that same Virginia Tech shooter could not buy a firearm from a licensed firearms dealer. I believe, as did the Review Panel, that it would be remiss to not ask the question where would the next Virginia Tech shooter, one that can not buy from a license dealers, where would he be likely to go to purchase his guns. Probably he would go to a location where no questions are asked and sales make from the trunks of vehicles, such as a public invited gun show. The Panel recommended, without dissent, that the gun show loophole be closed.

There is one other point I would like to make in closing. Virginia has a one gun a month law. The Virginia Tech shooter complied with the thirty requirement by purchasing the second gun on the thirty-ninth day from his first gun.. Often our laws do not provide the silver bullet being sought to solve complex problems such as with crime and gun

violence. I suspect such is true with the gun show loophole. It is not a silver bullet. But for me and lots of other citizens commonsense tells us the loophole needs closing. The shooter waiting just beyond the thirty days to buy his second gun tells me that the laws you pass and the actions you take as our legislators do matter and they do impact the decisions of those intending to do us harm. Thank you.