



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence  
**ACTIONALLIANCE**

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS STATEMENT re: SB 626/HB 766

### Domestic violence advocacy group warns of legislation's potential unintended consequences

By a vote of 32 to 8, Virginia Senators passed a well-intentioned, yet potentially harmful bill yesterday that encourages victims of domestic violence to take the law into their own hands.

**Senate bill 626** (and its companion House bill 766) will allow victims of domestic violence to use a Family Abuse Protective Order to serve as a concealed weapons permit for 45 days or until the order expires. The legislation sends a false message to victims: a firearm will protect you.

"We appreciate the intention of this bill, but guns and domestic violence don't mix," said Kristi VanAudenhove, Executive Director of the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance, "Rather than increasing access to firearms, **evidence shows** that **removing** firearms from domestic violence situations effectively increases safety for victims."

Firearms and domestic violence are a lethal combination, no matter which party has the permit to use the gun. **31% of all homicides** in 2014 in Virginia were attributed to family and intimate partner violence. 54% of those homicides were committed with a firearm.

Adding firearms to an already volatile and dangerous situation increases the risk that a victim of domestic violence will be killed. In one study, the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation was estimated to **increase that likelihood by 5 times**.

VanAudenhove continued "Perpetrators of domestic violence routinely exploit the criminal legal system to further abuse and terrorize their victims by seeking and obtaining temporary Protective Orders against victims. With this bill, anyone who successfully petitions for a Protective Order would be able to carry a concealed weapon for 45 days (or until the order expires)—before a judge even has the opportunity to hear their case. This would circumvent Virginia's concealed carry permitting procedures, and would further endanger victims, children, and the communities in which they live."

When faced with having to use lethal force to protect their lives (or the lives of their children), victims of domestic violence who "successfully" defend themselves fare poorly in criminal trials. A **California state prison study** found that 93% of the women convicted of killing an intimate partner had been abused by that partner.

"We recognize that supporters of the legislation are trying to help victims of domestic violence, but unfortunately we disagree with their assessment," said VanAudenhove, "Due to the likelihood of unintended consequences blowing back on victims, we simply cannot support this legislation. We ask concerned citizens to contact their representatives today to express their opposition to these bills."

To find contact information for your representatives, visit **Who's My Legislator** at: <http://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>.

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#### About the Virginia Sexual & Domestic Violence Action Alliance

The Action Alliance has been Virginia's leading voice on sexual and domestic violence for more than 30 years and enhances response and prevention efforts through training, public policy advocacy, public awareness programs, and technical assistance to professionals. [www.vsdvalliance.org](http://www.vsdvalliance.org) @VAActionAlliance

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