

**Testimony in Support of Rhode Island HB 5443**  
**By Law Professor Fred Vars**  
**March 26, 2025**

Good morning. My name is Fred Vars. I'm a law professor at the University of Alabama, testifying on my own behalf. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in favor of House Bill 5443.

Suicide claimed the lives of over 49,000 Americans in 2022. A majority of those deaths involved a firearm. Firearm suicides outnumber homicides by a wide margin.

House Bill 5443 would reduce this tragic death toll by allowing people who fear suicide to voluntarily and confidentially suspend their OWN ability to purchase firearms.

No one is forced to participate, and no one's firearms will be taken away. A person on the list can even choose later to have their name removed, which would be automatic. No questions asked.

We know that this optional cooling-off period will save many lives. That's because suicide is often impulsive. With a gun, there are no second chances. When people do get a second chance after a suicide attempt, only 10% die eventually by suicide. 90% choose life.

Would anyone sign up?

I would.

I have bipolar disorder. I've been suicidal. A terrifying 15% of people with bipolar disorder die by suicide. If I had had easy access to a gun at certain points in my life, I might already be one of them.

People who have never been severely depressed cannot understand what it's like. You lose joy, you lose hope, and you lose the ability to make rational decisions.

However, like most people with mental illness, I have periods of clarity. During good times, I want to protect myself against future dark days.

So do thousands of other people. I anonymously surveyed 200 people receiving psychiatric care at a major medical center. Nearly half (46%) said they'd sign up.

Please support House Bill 5443. Help us help ourselves.