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Senate of Pennsylvania

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August 8, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Baker  
Chairwoman of the Senate Judiciary Committee  
362 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Senator Baker:

I want to thank you for your willingness to hold a series of public meetings on tougher gun laws in Pennsylvania. Since the start of 2019, 62 people have been killed in the United States as a result of mass shootings. Half of them just last weekend within a 24-hour period in Dayton, Ohio, and El Paso, Texas. The topic hits especially close to home for myself since we will be coming up on the one-year anniversary of the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting that occurred in Pittsburgh where a gunman killed 11 people. These victims were sons and daughters, parents and grandparents, relatives and family members not to mention members of our communities and friends to so many.

Shortly after the Stonewall Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida in February 2018 where 17 people were killed, I introduced two bills: an assault weapons ban and an extreme risk protection order. Senate Bill 292 would prohibit a person from possessing, manufacturing, importing, selling or transferring an assault weapon or large capacity magazine in Pennsylvania. The legislation does not apply to the following individuals in the performance of their official duties: law enforcement officers; state parole agents; a county probation or parole officer who is authorized to carry this type of weapon; a chief administrator, deputy warden or corrections officer; constable; members of the armed forces of the United States; and officers or employees of the United States who are duly authorized to carry an assault weapon.

Senate Bill 293 would allow a family or household member or a law enforcement officer to petition the court for an extreme risk protection order (ERPO) if they believe that an individual poses a significant danger of causing personal injury to oneself or others. After a court ordered hearing and upon issuance of an order, the respondent would have to surrender to the local law enforcement agency all firearms in the individual's custody, control or possession and firearm license within 48 hours.

Analyses by the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence show that states with the strictest gun-control measures have the lowest rates of gun deaths. At the same time, those with the most lax laws have the highest. Senate Bill 292 mirrors language that is very similar to what was enacted in Connecticut after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting, which is considered to be some of the toughest in the nation.

Semi-automatic, assault-style weapons have been the weapons of choice in these mass shootings. I feel that my legislation is sensible ban on military-grade weapons that have no place in civilian life and are unnecessary for self-defense. These guns were made to kill people quickly and efficiently.

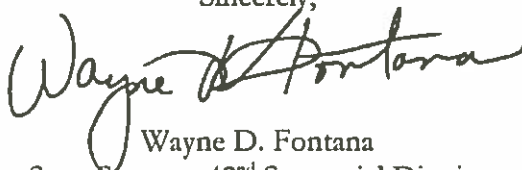
At the same time, mass shooters often display numerous warning signs and threatening behaviors before their attacks. Family members are often the first to witness these displays, however, without an extreme risk protection order law, many times states have no clear process to restrict these individual's access to guns. Currently, 17 states and the District of Columbia have passed ERPO laws.

A Franklin and Marshall College poll of 627 registered voters across Pennsylvania was conducted July 29-Aug. 4 with the final calls going out just as the nation was learning of the mass shootings. The pool found that nearly two-thirds of registered voters said they favor some type of additional laws regulating gun ownership. Four prior polls, taken between august 2018 and March 2019, all found anywhere from 62% to 65% of those questioned favored additional laws to regulate gun ownership.

While my beliefs are that Congress should be the body taking up additional gun proposals since this is a nationwide problem, in the meantime, I am writing to you to ask if you will consider including the topic of my bills during the upcoming hearings. I understand that SB 292 and 293 will not solve all problems, but I feel that they should be examined and explored in light of the recent shootings as potential roadblock for those that are intent on mass killings.

I thank you for consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wayne D. Fontana". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Wayne" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Fontana".

Wayne D. Fontana  
State Senator, 42<sup>nd</sup> Senatorial District

cc: Senator Lawrence Farnese, Minority Chair