

My name is Savannah and I am a 24-year-old college student. I am also a daughter, a niece, and a friend. There is part of my identity, however, I never expected to have; I am a sexual assault survivor.

In the fall of 2016 I was living my dream. I had just begun my senior year of college. I was at my dream school, with my dream major. I loved my job and was just months away from graduating college. I was so excited to finish college, especially as a first generation college student. What started out as any normal day ended up becoming a nightmare.

That night I was sexually assaulted.

I will spare you the details, but it was the worst thing that's ever happened to me. I pray that none of you ever go through what I did, but I do know that this sort of thing seems like it can never happen to you. Before I was raped, I saw sexual assault as something that only happened to other people. It's no secret sexual violence is [prevalent](#) on college campuses, but I took as many precautions as I could and tucked my concerns away in the far corner of my mind.

But after that night I could no longer be naive. I had to come face to face with the harsh reality that there are terrible people in this world that do terrible things.

Detectives Benson and Stabler didn't swoop in to save me that night like they do in Law and Order: SVU. Instead, I was left completely shattered, replaying the events of that night over and over again. Due to the trauma, I dropped out of my dream school during my senior year and moved back home to Virginia. It was the hardest decision I've ever had to make, but I knew in my heart it was what I had to do. I shut myself away from everyone and spent my time hiding in my childhood bedroom. I gained 100 pounds, and my hair even began to fall out due to the stress.

I am a gun owner and was one at the time. I even began safety training and target practice when I was 10 years old, but because of so called "common sense" gun control laws, I was left defenseless that night. In theory, I could have broken the senseless law and brought my firearm to college with me anyways, but I knew that wasn't the right thing to do. I obeyed the law as a responsible gun owner and it ended with me being raped. I am just one of countless examples of gun control benefiting assailants and making victims sitting ducks.

I'm not telling you about my sexual assault to make you feel bad. To be clear, I don't want your sympathy. What I do want, however, is for you to *at least* consider stories like mine when you decide to advocate for laws that create additional physical and financial barriers to the right to self-defense. I could come up here and recite the Second Amendment, as could I recite statistics all day long. I could get up here and scream about how since 1950, [97.8% of mass shootings](#) have occurred in gun free zones, but in this debate, few care about the statistics – it's about emotion.

But that emotion is understandable. There ARE things in this world worth being angry about. Acts of pure evil and gross injustices of all kinds seem to surround us, and there is no doubt that we hurt as a nation. But in the midst of our emotions, no matter how valid, we have to remember and come back to the facts.

And the facts say this:

- H.R. 8 has the potential to make make responsible, law-abiding gun owners suddenly criminals in emergency situations that thankfully end up as false alarms [proposed 18 U.S.C. 922(t)(2)(D)] or when transferring a firearm to some of their beloved family members, like their stepchild. And with all of this, H.R. 8 wouldn't have stopped a single mass shooting in modern history.
- Requiring universal background checks adds yet another financial barrier to the right to self-defense, even though it's already [pricey](#) to exercise Second Amendment rights and low income individuals are at a [higher risk](#) of being the victim of violent crime.
- An analysis released by the University of Pittsburgh showed lawful gun owners [commit](#) less than a fifth of all gun crimes.
- Three separate 2018 studies [found](#) zero evidence that universal background checks prevent gun deaths.

I want to show you that there are real people with real stories where being allowed to legally have their firearm could have saved them.

Gun owners are a diverse group. No, we're not all Republicans [and no](#), we're not all NRA members. I am a college student willing to bare her soul to the world if it means people think twice before enacting laws that restrict the right to a reliable means of self-defense.

I once heard that when you're raped, you're split in two, but this allows you to come back twice as strong. I couldn't agree more. I refuse to live in fear. Yes, I am a rape survivor, but the 9mm I carry on my hip allows me to stand tall, stay strong, and confidently say "NEVER AGAIN".

But more than anything, I want my "never again" to be a catalyst for other women's "never going to happen".