



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 19, 2023

CONTACT: Jade Byers
jade.byers@tn.gov

VIDEO: Gov. Lee Calls on General Assembly to Pass ‘Order of Protection’ Bill to Strengthen Safety, Preserve Constitutional Rights

“We cannot give up. We cannot shy away from the hard decisions...We owe Tennesseans a vote.”

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Today, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee [called](#) on the Tennessee General Assembly to pass legislation for a new ‘Order of Protection’ law before the end of the legislative session to strengthen the safety and preserve the constitutional rights of law-abiding citizens. This bill, which was drafted with input from legislative leadership, the Governor’s office and relevant departments, will improve Tennessee’s existing ‘Order of Protection’ framework. By guaranteeing due process and enhancing access to mental health support, this proposal is the best way to help individuals who intend to harm themselves or others, protect constitutional rights and keep our communities safe.

Following the tragic Covenant shooting, the Governor [asked](#) the legislature to bring forward proposals to ensure dangerous individuals who are a threat to themselves or others do not have access to weapons, while requiring due process and a high burden of proof to preserve the Second Amendment.

Gov. Lee’s video message can be viewed [here](#).

Full transcript:

Tennesseans – I want to share an update with you. The past few weeks have been some of our most difficult as a state.

We’ve been working really hard on solutions and have reached a pivotal moment, and I want to speak to that today.

There have been times in American history when great tragedy caused those who are elected to serve to come together and respond with thoughtful action...action to improve laws, preserve rights and protect communities.

We hear stories of pragmatic leaders who collectively stepped outside of their party lines to do what they thought was the right thing, changing the course of history for the better.

But what the history books don’t always capture is the difficulty of those moments when leaders are standing at a crossroads, choosing between the easy path and the right path.

I believe we find ourselves at that moment today. We are standing at a crossroads.

Tennesseans are asking us to set aside politics and personal pride. They are depending on us to do the right thing.

Since the tragedy at Covenant, we've worked with the General Assembly to pass our school safety legislation by wide bipartisan margins.

I signed an Executive Order to make sure that law enforcement, the judicial system, and mental health professionals are sharing information effectively, so the background check process works like it should.

I also called on legislators to come together and find a solution for the most difficult challenge of all.

We all agree that dangerous, unstable individuals who intend to harm themselves or others should not have access to weapons. And that should be done in a way that requires due process and a high burden of proof, supports law enforcement and punishes false reporting, enhances mental health support, and preserves the Second Amendment for law-abiding citizens.

Tennesseans agree with this. Legislators agree with this. Second Amendment advocates agree with this.

And so, throughout the last couple of weeks, I have worked with members of the General Assembly – constitutionally minded, second amendment protecting members – to craft legislation for an improved Order of Protection Law that will strengthen the safety and preserve the rights of Tennesseans.

To be specific, I'm proposing that we improve our state's law so that it protects more Tennesseans and reaches more individuals who are struggling and in need of mental health support.

There is broad agreement that this is the right approach. It should be that simple...but sadly, it's not.

Political groups began drawing their battle lines before the bill was even completed.

These are the moments for which the people of Tennessee elected us to listen and to act. I'm not saying it's easy, but it is possible when we're talking about the safety of our children, our teachers and innocent lives.

The only thing standing in our way is politics – on both sides of the aisle.

*National politicians and pundits – even the White House – are calling our proposal something that it's not. "Red flag" is nothing but a toxic political label meant to draw lines in the sand so nothing gets done. **This is about Tennessee and the unique needs of our people. It should be reviewed on its own merits – not lumped in with laws from other states, many of which, I believe, don't strike the right balance of preserving rights and protecting society.***

And some advocates of the Second Amendment say something called "involuntary commitment" is the answer, but that would restrict all kinds of constitutional rights, including the Second Amendment. It's not the best way.

Efforts like the ones I just mentioned don't deliver the right results. They don't actually preserve the constitutional rights of Tennesseans in the best way possible, and they don't actually get to the heart of the problem of preventing tragedies.

This is hard. I've said that all along.

But in Tennessee right now, if a husband threatens to hurt his wife, an Order of Protection would temporarily restrict his access to weapons to protect the spouse.

If that same man threatens to shoot himself or a church or a mall, our proposal will provide that same level of protection to the broader public.

We have a proven solution that gets to the heart of the problem – an improved Order of Protection law to save lives and preserve the Second Amendment.

This is a pivotal moment. But both sides are at risk of standing in the way of a thoughtful, practical solution.

Why?

Politics. Division.

But we cannot give up. We cannot shy away from the hard decisions.

And so, once again, I'm asking the General Assembly to take a vote on this improved Order of Protection proposal before they end the legislative session.

We owe Tennesseans a vote.

The tragedy at Covenant didn't create the problem. Rather, it has shown – more clearly than ever before – that we can do more to protect students, teachers, communities and Constitutional rights.

This moment doesn't have to be defined by tragedy alone. It can also be defined by hope – and results.

We've done this before – the Governor's office working together with the legislature to rise above politics and lead through division...to search our hearts and do that which I believe Tennesseans have elected us to do.

Tennesseans are depending on us.

I believe we live in the greatest state in the country, and this is our chance to show it once again.

###