



Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

DATE: April 22, 2021

TO: Chair Smith Warner and members of the House Committee on Rules

FROM: Angela Zallen, MD, FAAP
Oregon Pediatric Society Board Vice President

SUBJECT: Support for SB 554A, Safe Gun Storage

The Oregon Pediatric Society (OPS) is the state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Our membership is committed to improving and protecting the health and well-being of all children in Oregon, as well as those who care for them. For the record, my name is Dr. Angela Zallen. I am a pediatric hospitalist in Springfield, Oregon, and the Board Vice President of Oregon Pediatric Society. I am writing today on behalf of the Oregon Pediatric Society because we strongly endorsed SB 554A to ensure that guns are stored safely to prevent accidental or intentional deaths from firearms.

As a pediatric hospitalist, one of the most common hospitalizations I see are teenagers who need to be admitted for medical stabilization after a suicide attempt. The proportion of hospitalizations during this pandemic due to suicide attempts have drastically increased. The teenagers I see and care for are those that have attempted suicide by overdosing on medications and require medical stabilization, but these methods are most often not lethal. Many of these suicide attempts are impulsive acts related to severe situational depression or hopelessness, and many teenagers express regret and remorse for this act. In fact, most people who attempt suicide do not go on to die by suicide later. Every time I care for one of these patients, I always think about the fact that if this teenager had access to a firearm, they would be profoundly more likely to die by suicide than survive it. My colleagues in the outpatient clinic have been overwhelmed with visits with children as young as 9 years old who have depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. I see the Emergency Department census on days I am on service, and there are often children and teenagers who spend days boarding in the Emergency department because they are in distress and awaiting inpatient psychiatric placement.

“Policies that effectively reduce access to lethal means of suicide save lives.”¹ In the United States, 33% of homes with children own firearms and in half of these homes, the firearms are not locked up. 40% of adolescents in homes with guns report that they have access to those firearms.¹ We know that restricting access to firearms can prevent suicide deaths especially in



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children, and we also know that safely storing gun will drastically reduce the number of younger children that die or kill someone else accidentally due to accessing a firearm in their home. The safest home for a child is one without any guns in it, but the second safest is a home in which firearms are appropriately and safely stored to prevent children from ever accessing them.

We can save lives by enacting this legislation to ensure that guns are stored safely. Child safety and injury prevention needs to be a priority in these discussions because it is children and teens that are disproportionately affected by unsafe firearms storage in the home. I urge you strongly to vote in favor of SB 544-A to give voice to the voiceless – the children who cannot vote but are profoundly affected by these policies and the children and teens who have lost their lives or lost family members to gun violence. They deserve better.

References:

1. John, A., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2020). Access to firearms and adolescent suicide. *BMJ*, M2829. doi:10.1136/bmj.m2829