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TESTIMONY OF JEANNE MILSTEIN, CHILD ADVOCATE

BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

MARCH 24, 2006

Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Committee. I am Jeanne Milstein, the Child Advocate for the state of Connecticut. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill No. 5818, An Act Concerning Lost or Stolen Firearms.

House Bill No. 5818, An Act Concerning Lost Or Stolen Firearms, aims to reduce the occurrence of stolen and lost firearms and requires all lost or stolen firearms be reported to the authorities within 72 hours. This bill is of interest to me because my office has become extremely concerned about the increasing level of gun violence involving children in Connecticut. As you may know, I am the Chair of the Child Fatality Review Panel.¹ Connecticut's Child Fatality Review Panel (CTCFRP) investigates and reviews all unexpected and unexplained fatalities of children under the age of 18 and the circumstances surrounding a child's unexplained² death to identify risk factors that may have contributed to a child's death. The panel uses this information to develop methods aimed at lessening the number of unexplained and unexpected infant and child deaths.

Between October 1, 2001 and September 30, 2005, 16 children died in Connecticut as the result of gunshot wounds: 2 children aged of 2 to 7, 2 aged 10 to 14, and 12 aged 15 to 17. At ages 15 to 17, homicides are most often by firearms. In Connecticut, family members were responsible for 43% of child homicides occurring between 2001 and 2005, with 33% of these resulting from gunshot wounds. During the same time period, 4 children committed suicide using a gun.

In addition, over the period of nine years, 1995-2003, 1,467 children (an average of 163 per year) came to Connecticut emergency rooms with an injury caused by a firearm. The impact of such gun violence cannot be calculated. The children who die, and those injured as well, have parents, brothers, and sisters who are affected. Their extended families are affected. Their schoolmates are affected.

Given these numbers, it is vital that Connecticut take whatever steps it can to prevent gun violence. By requiring gun owners to store their guns in a responsible way, requiring them to report lost or stolen guns to the police, and establishing penalties for those who fail to do so, house bill no. 5818 is a step in the right direction. For that reason, I ask that you support house bill no. 5818.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ See CGS § 46a-131(b) through (e).

² Infant and child deaths are unexplained in the absence of a known medical condition or recognizable disease. In these cases, the law requires the medical examiner to determine the child's manner and cause of death.