STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE
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TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE FOR
THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

JUDICIAL COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING
MONDAY, MARCH 11, 2019

IN SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING BILL:

H.B. No. 7218: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS IN THE HOME.

Senator Winfield and Representative Stafstrom and all other distinguished members of the Judicial Committee:

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Office of the Child Advocate ("OCA") in support of H.B. 7218, An Act Concerning the Safe Storage of Firearms in the Home.

The obligations of the OCA are to review, investigate where necessary, and make recommendations regarding how our state-funded systems meet the needs of vulnerable children. This Legislature granted the OCA broad authority regarding access to information about children and state-funded facilities and programs, which provides this Office with a unique insight into the needs of at-risk, abused, neglected and special needs children and the agencies that serve those children. Proposed Bill No.7218, in which the OCA is offering the following testimony seeks to address how the needs of this state’s children are being met, including its most vulnerable children.

H.B. NO. 7218: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS IN THE HOME.

The OCA strongly supports H.B. No 7218, An Act Concerning the Safe Storage of Firearms in the Home, which works to strengthen our state's firearm laws with regard to safe storage by: (i) providing greater protection to children up to age eighteen (18) with stricter storage requirements and (ii) creating liability and criminal penalties for persons who do not adhere to the storage requirement that results in injury or death caused by a child up to age eighteen (18).
The OCA compiles data regarding child fatalities as part of its reporting responsibilities. Based on that data, between January 1, 2001 and December 31, 2018, 126 children (birth through age 17) have died as a result of gun related injuries. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of those deaths were homicides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner of Death</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homicides: 98 (77%)</td>
<td>Boys: 101 (80%)</td>
<td>White: 57 (45%)</td>
<td>Birth and 14 years old: (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicides: 23 (18%)</td>
<td>Girls: 25 (20%)</td>
<td>Black: 54 (43%)</td>
<td>Ages 15 – 17: (87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident: 2</td>
<td>Hispanic: 14 (11%)</td>
<td>Other: 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined: 3</td>
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Responsible storage of firearms is a critical component in keeping guns out of the hands of children and preventing injury and deaths caused by the use of those firearms by children who are too young and inexperienced to understand the significance of gun safety. This Bill takes one more step toward preventing injury and deaths caused by children with guns by recognizing that children up to age eighteen (18) are just as vulnerable as children up to age sixteen (16), and especially when it comes to firearms.

The National Rifle Association ("NRA") acknowledges that gun storage safety is critical to the safety of all and that the "Don't Touch" policy may not work for every household. The NRA supports a number of safe storage methods, including:

- Trigger Locks
- Locked Gun Cases and Carry Cases
- Strong Boxes and Security Cases
- Locking Steel Gun Cabinets
- Gun Safes

There is no reason why a responsible gun owner cannot ensure that his/her gun(s) are safety stored in order to prevent unauthorized users, including vulnerable children, from having access to those weapons. As aptly stated by the National Shooting Sports Foundation’s Project ChildSafe Organization, "nearly all firearms accidents in the home can be prevented simply by making sure that guns are kept unloaded and secured when not in use, with ammunition stored in a separate location."

The OCA strongly supports this Bill but offers one amendment. Massachusetts is currently the only state that requires guns to be "secured in a locked container or equipped with a tamper-resistant mechanical lock or other safety device, properly engaged so as to render such weapon inoperable by any person other than the owner or other lawfully authorized user." The OCA urges legislators to have Connecticut join Massachusetts and require guns to be in a locked contained or equipped with a tamper-resistant mechanical lock or other safety device. Taking this critical step will further ensure.

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1 Includes the tragic deaths of twenty (20) children from the mass murder at Sandy Hook Elementary School.
2 Available on the web at: https://www.nrafamily.org/articles/2016/4/14/6-ways-to-safely-store-your-firearms/.
4 M.G.L. Chapter 140 § 131L.
that guns are not getting into the hands of children or other unauthorized individual. Based on the
discovery of tragic events in Connecticut involving guns and the number of fatalities due to gun use, it
is a progressive step that needs to be taken. The OCA urges leaders to continue to work together to
promote safe gun storage safety and educate citizens about the dangers of guns that are not safety
stored.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter impacting this state’s most vulnerable
children. The OCA is committed to ensuring the safety of Connecticut’s most vulnerable children
through its continued efforts to work effectively with agency personnel and leadership regarding
recommendations for system improvement.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Signature]

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