Testimony for the Joint Committee on Judiciary

IN SUPPORT of Raised H.B. No. 7218

“AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS IN THE HOME.”

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Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary, I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the raised H.B. No. 7218. I, Christopher Schenck, am a medical student at the Yale School of Medicine. I am testifying as a private citizen, and my views do not reflect the views of the Yale School of Medicine.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support the raised H.B. No. 7218 because of the extensive burden of firearm-related injury and mortality in children and adolescents.

More than 3,000 children and adolescents died as a result of firearm-related injury in 2016, including over 1,000 suicides, making firearm death the second leading cause of death among youth\(^1\). We know that there is a strong relationship between firearm access and suicide in adolescents. More than 40% of completed suicides in teenagers between 15 and 19 involved the use of a firearm\(^2\). Additionally, adolescents who completed suicide are more than 2.5 times more likely than their peers to have access to a firearm\(^3\). In the majority of cases where a child attempts or completes suicide with a firearm, that firearm was owned by someone living in the same household as the child\(^4\). These are preventable deaths, and protecting children by regulating their access to firearms will be crucial in addressing the issue of youth suicide.

Safe firearm storage is an important step in preventing self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries in children and adolescents. In cases where children and adolescents attempted or completed suicide with a firearm or were injured by an unintentional discharge, the firearms were less likely to be stored locked, unloaded, or separate from ammunition\(^5\). The raised H.B. No. 7218 requires safe storage of firearms on the premises where individuals under the age of 18 may have access to them. Defining a minor as an individual under 18, compared to an individual under 16 under the definition in the current Section 29-37i, will help further protect adolescents at an age where they are at higher risk of suicide. Access to a firearm can be the difference between life and death in a time of crisis. H.B. No. 7218 will help protect the children of Connecticut from firearm suicide and unintentional death.

I am early in my medical training, and I have not yet met a patient affected by gun violence; the unfortunate reality is that I inevitably will. Gun violence is a public health crisis in America, and we must act now to prevent these senseless deaths. I ask that the Committee support the raised H.B. No. 7218 to protect the health and wellbeing of everyone living in Connecticut.