Testimony in Support of H.B. No. 7218 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS IN THE HOME

I am writing in support of H.B. No. 7218, Ethan’s Law, as a parent, a concerned citizen, and a mental health professional.

Access to firearms within a home is far too easy for our most curious and most vulnerable citizens, children and adolescents. Parents, guardians, and others in contact with children have a responsibility to protect our young ones from harm both intentional and unintentional. Requiring the safe storage of firearms will save lives.

Safely storing firearms protects children and adolescents with mental health challenges, particularly including suicidal thoughts. Harvard School of Public Health cites a study in which in 82% of adolescent suicides completed by firearms used firearms owned by their parents. Of those cases in which storage was noted, two-thirds were left unlocked (https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/youth-access/). We can only wonder how many of these young people would have been able to access supportive mental health services and thrive if the most lethal means of suicide was not immediately available to them.

Despite warnings and education from parents, young people cannot fully understand the extent of harm they can do with a firearm. Their brains are still developing and decision-making abilities and judgement are one of the last functions to develop, with many scientists now believing these abilities may not fully mature until age 25.

I have experienced the loss of young people to firearms first hand. One of my previous clients died by suicide using a firearm. A neighbor’s son shot and killed himself with the parent’s gun. Numerous young people I worked with killed each other and were killed during my work with gang involved young people. I live in fear of my family member’s children finding and playing with her husband’s firearms in a state where there are few regulations on their use and storage. I can’t tell you how many of these lives could have been saved or would be saved by safe storage of firearms, but I don’t know a single parent who would regret preserving their child’s life if given the chance.

Gun owners must be held responsible for the harm that their firearms can and do cause on a daily basis. We cannot allow any more of Connecticut’s young people to be harmed by careless storage of tools created to cause physical harm and death.

Sincerely,

Emilie Steinnagel, LCSW

Guilford, CT 06437