HB 7218, AN ACT CONCERNING THE SAFE STORAGE OF FIREARMS IN THE HOME

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. My name is Pina Violano. I am a registered nurse and research scientist with a PhD in Public Health. I am also an appointed member of Connecticut’s Child Fatality Review Panel and the American College of Surgeon’s Committee on Trauma’s Injury Prevention and Control Committee and Firearm Safety Workgroup. I am testifying as a private citizen who is a responsible firearm owner.

With over 38 years’ experience in critical care and emergency medicine, I know firsthand about the devastations that result from firearms that impact individuals, their families, and the community as a whole. A major part of my prevention and research efforts have focused on prevention of firearm injuries and death through the use of gun safety devices and safe storage practices, the use of gun buyback programs as a venue to dispose of unwanted firearms, firearms training: what’s actually being taught, helping gun store owners in the recognition of mental health symptoms and prevention of selling firearms as well as other topics surrounding urban gun violence.

Like the over 100 organizations representing health care providers, I too consider the number of firearm injuries and related deaths that occur each day to be a serious public health epidemic. Researchers, like myself, have found that having a firearm in the home is a risk factor for injuries and deaths, including suicides, among adults and children alike.\(^1\) While household firearms can pose a danger to anyone, the inherent curiosity of children makes them particularly susceptible to harm from an unsecured firearm.\(^2\) According to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were approximately 85,000 individuals seen in emergency departments in the United States for firearm-related injuries in 2015, with children under the age of 18 accounting for 6,900 of these injuries.\(^3\) CDC data also indicate that there were more than 36,000 firearm-related deaths in 2015, almost 1,500 of which involved children. In addition, nearly two-thirds of all firearm-related deaths in 2015 were suicides.

Results from one of my research studies showed that more than half (54.5%) of the participants who attend gun buyback program did not purchase the firearm, acquiring it through inheritance, gift, or random find. Most (74.8%) had previous firearms training and were relinquishing the firearm for safety reasons (68.3%). Those relinquishing firearms for safety reasons were less likely to have purchased the firearm (odds ratio [OR], 2.46, p G 0.05), less likely to have any formal training (OR, 5.92; p G 0.01), and less likely to keep the firearm locked (OR, 3.50; p G 0.01). Fifty-three percent of those turning in firearms reported having at least one more firearm at home and requested a safety device. In at least one of the cities participating in this study, as many as 30 percent of the weapons used in gun wielding criminal acts were burglarized from the home of legal gun owners that had failed to secure them properly.

A second study I conducted sought to determine if the manner of storage of a firearm in a home could potentially make a difference in the outcomes of intentional and unintentional injuries involving a firearm; specifically addressing the use of gun safes and devices that block/disable firearm function (trigger locks, cable locks, etc.). A comprehensive review of the literature was performed. We conditionally recommend that gun locks be used to prevent unintentional firearm injury. In addition, because of the large effect size and the reasonable quality of available evidence with safe storage of firearms, we recommend safe storage prevent firearm-related injuries.
Several other surveys and studies have reported estimates that firearms are present in 32 to 39 percent of households in the United States. Many organizations agree that firearms should be properly stored to prevent access by unauthorized users. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) both recommend that firearms be stored unloaded, locked, and separate from locked ammunition. According to some studies, gun owners who practice safe storage are less likely to incur firearm-related injury or death by accidental and self-inflicted means. Yet, one study estimated that over one-quarter of household guns are stored loaded, and half of these are not kept locked.

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. I thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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3. In this report, we define “children” as individuals under age 18. Estimates of firearm-related injuries and deaths are from CDC’s Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System. These estimates are from 2015, which is the most recent year such data are available.

4. Estimates of households with firearms from nationally representative surveys conducted by the Gallup Poll, the General Social Survey, and Pew Research Center. The Gallup Poll estimated that 39 percent of respondents reported a firearm in the home in 2016, while the General Social Survey and Pew Research Center found that 32 percent and 33 percent of respondents, respectively, reported household firearms. These survey estimates are similar to estimates in some of the studies we identified. For example, one study, estimated that nationally, 32.6 percent of adults reported that firearms were kept in or around their home. See Okoro, C. A., et al., “Prevalence of Household Firearms and Firearm-Storage Practices in the 50 States and the District of Columbia: Findings from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2002,” *Pediatrics*, vol. 116, no. 3 (September 2005).


