March 11, 2019

Senator Winfield, representative Stafstrom, ranking members Kissel and Rebiemas and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary:

My name is Anh Vo, I am from New Haven, CT. I am a medical student currently studying at the Yale School of Public Health. I am working with Connecticut Against Gun Violence for my public health practicum.

I am testifying in strong support of H.B. 7218, An Act Concerning the Safe Storage of Firearms in the Home.

As a future physician, I feel it is my duty to advocate for patients, and I believe we must address firearms injuries as a public health crisis. During my third year of medical school, I cared for patients as young as age six with prior gunshot injuries. I know it’s only a matter of time before I’m called to respond to a trauma involving a firearm injury; a few of my classmates in medical school have already faced this reality. Though some wounds may heal, our patients carry with them the lasting psychological and emotional scars. And for every individual injured or killed by gun violence, many more individuals and communities are impacted.

We need legislation that expands safe storage requirements to include unloaded firearms and to apply to minors ages 16 and 17. Parents may have misperceptions of their children’s behavior around firearms. In one study, nearly 40% of parents wrongly believed their children did not know the storage location of a household gun and 22% mistakenly believed that their children had never handled household guns; their children contradicted them. In recent work presented at the American Academy of Pediatrics 2018 National Conference & Exhibition, researchers found that only 41% of children ages 7 to 17 surveyed could distinguish photos of real and toy firearms despite the fact that many parents expressed confidence in their children’s ability to do so. Due to the gap between their perception and reality, many parents may underestimate the risk associated with firearms stored in the home.

Including unloaded firearms in the safe storage requirements may prevent another family from grieving the death of their child as the Song family of Guilford have for over a year. Applying safe storage requirements to include minors ages 16 and 17 may prevent a youth from gaining access to a firearm and inflicting self-harm. Nearly 45% of completed suicides in adolescents between ages 15 and 19 involved a firearm. Adolescents often experience very strong emotions and have difficulty seeing past a temporary setback. Their brains have not matured fully, which makes them impulsive, and relatively more likely to attempt suicide,” says Dr. Denise Dowd. This means that intent isn’t the only factor that determines whether a youth dies in a suicide attempt; the means of suicide also matters. Expanding safe firearm storage is an important step in preventing unintentional and self-inflicted firearms injuries in children and adolescents. It will save lives.

Along with H.B 7218, I also support H.B 7223, H.B. 7219, and S.B. 60 and urge you to favorably vote these bills out of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for your time and for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Anh Vo
New Haven, CT

