



**Testimony to the Judiciary Committee
By Jeremy Stein, Executive Director
CT Against Gun Violence, Inc. (CAGV) in support of: HB 7218, HB 7219, HB
7223 and in Opposition to HB 5227, HB 5870. SB 940**

To the Chairmen Senator Winfield, and Chairmen Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Senator Kissel and Representative Rebimbas and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary:

1) In Support Of H.B. 7218: An Act Concerning The Safe Storage Of Firearms In The Home And Hb 7223: An Act Concerning The Storage Of A Pistol Or Revolver In A Motor Vehicle.:

- *Every day, eight children are unintentionally shot or killed by a gun.ⁱ*
- *Over 80% of child firearm suicides used a gun belonging to a family member.ⁱⁱ*
- *The risk of teen suicide—the third leading cause of death among 15 to 19 year olds—increases when there is a gun in the home, even more so when the firearm is kept loaded.ⁱⁱⁱ The rate of firearm suicide among children and teens has increased 61% over the past decade.^{iv}*
- *Studies show that child access prevention laws, and safe storage in general, reduce the risk of adolescent suicide. One found that keeping a gun locked lowers the risk of both unintentional injury and suicide for children and teenagers by 73%.^v*
- *A study found that households that locked both firearms and ammunition had an 85% lower risk of unintentional gun deaths compared to those who lock neither.^{vi}*
- *4.6 million children live in a home with an unlocked, loaded firearm.^{vii}*
- *The U.S. General Accounting Office estimated that 31% of accidental deaths caused by firearms might be prevented with the addition of two devices: a child-proof safety lock and a loading indicator.^{viii}*
- *More than 75% of 1st and 2nd graders know where their parents keep their firearms and one-third admitted handling the weapons, contradicting their parents' reports.^{ix}*
- *In 2015, approximately 1.1 million students ages 12–18 reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission^x.*
- *On average, there are 1,550 incidents of students having firearms at public schools each school year.^{xi} 75% of guns used in school shootings come from the shooter's home or that of a relative.^{xii}*



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Securely stored firearms—whether loaded or not—would prevent most of these tragedies. This is not a novel concept, as storing firearms is something that all gun owners are taught, and it is one of their primary responsibilities. Expanding safe storage requirements will help save lives from multiple sources of gun violence: unintentional shootings, crime-related gun violence (facilitated by stolen guns), suicide, school and other mass shootings. It will also send a clear message to irresponsible gun owners: lock up your firearms when they are not in your immediate control or be held accountable both criminally and civilly

Access to guns by children often leads to tragedy. Ethan Song, a 15-year old from Guilford, was killed in January 2018 when he got access to an unsecured handgun at a friend's house. Ethan's death was preventable. Instead of securely storing his weapon and ammunition, the friend's father stored his guns in an unsecure box, in the same location as the ammunition. The father wasn't held accountable under Connecticut state law because it couldn't be proven that the handgun was loaded when the teens gained access to it. As a result the State's Attorneys Office could not prosecute. Their hands were tied by a nonsensical distinction in the law.

Connecticut does not have a true safe storage law. Only Massachusetts has a true safe storage law, requiring owners to lock guns up when they are not in use. Under Connecticut Law a gun owner is only required to keep guns stored under certain circumstances. Under Sec 29-37i a gun owner must keep guns away from prohibited people, including children, however only loaded firearms in the home must be securely stored (or kept under the immediate control of the gun owner), and only when the gun owner knows or should know that 1) a minor under the age of 16 is likely to gain access without permission, 2) a resident in the home is ineligible to possess firearms under state or federal law or 3) a resident poses a risk of imminent personal injury to himself or to other individuals.

Ethan's death, could have been prevented, had the owner been required to lock up his gun, regardless if it was unloaded. This unloaded/loaded distinction should be removed from the law. Likewise, the definition of a minor should be raised to 18, to match the existing definition of juvenile law. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for the age group 10-19 according to the CDC. Firearms were the leading method of homicide death for Americans aged 10-19 years between 1999 and 2016.^{xiii}

Research by the American Academy of Pediatrics shows where gun laws are strictest half as many children die from firearms. Studies show that child access prevention laws, and safe storage in general, reduce the risk of adolescent suicide. One study found that keeping a gun locked lowers the risk of both unintentional injury and suicide for children and teenagers by 73%.^{xiv}

And let us not forget what happened in November 2018, in Hartford, when a four year old got access to an unsecured gun and shot himself. But it is not just accidental shootings that we can prevent with safe storage laws, it is also urban gun violence. "Ethan's Law" could also be called "Clinton's Law." Clinton Howell was a 12-year-old Bridgeport teen, who was killed in front of his own home by what was presumably a stolen gun. Guns that are stolen from suburban homes



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and motor vehicles are ending up in our cities. Hundreds of thousands of guns are stolen from homes and cars of legal gun owners and ending up in the hands of criminals.

Evidence suggests that most gun thefts are from owners who leave them unsecured in unlocked homes or cars^{xv}. On average, a gun is stolen in the U.S. every two minutes^{xvi}. It is estimated that from 2012 to 2015 more than 2,600 firearms were stolen in Connecticut.^{xvii} According to the National Crime Information Center, nearly two million weapons have been reported stolen over the last decade and this number is on the rise. Elsewhere in the country, a year-long investigation identified over 23,000 stolen guns recovered between 2010 and 2016, the vast majority of which were connected with other crimes.^{xviii} According to this study, the Trace found, "The trend is unambiguous: Gun theft is on the rise in many American cities, and many of those stolen weapons are later used to hurt and kill people."^{xix} Evidence suggests that most gun thefts are from owners who leave them unsecured in unlocked homes or cars^{xx}. Studies show that most guns recovered from crime scenes were stolen.^{xxi,xxii} Requiring handguns to be secured in unattended vehicles will choke off a key source of crime guns.

So vast and pressing is the problem that the International Association of Chiefs of Police recently tasked a team of top of law enforcement officials to develop a program that police officers and sheriff's deputies can use to press gun owners into safeguarding their weapons. HB 7218 and 7223 are designed at just that, to compel gun owners to safeguard their firearms, when they are not in the control of the lawful owner.

Locking up their firearms doesn't leave gun owners unprotected. First, both bills only apply when the gun owner is not carrying or in control of their firearm. HB7218 is also only applicable to "unattended" vehicles (and only handguns), meaning that the gun is in the car and the owner is not. Secondly, technology makes it possible to open a safe equipped with a digital keypad or fingerprint reader in just seconds.

It is irresponsible for a gun owner to leave a gun, loaded, or unloaded in a motor vehicle, when the vehicle is unattended. To not take every precaution to prevent a gun from ending up in the wrong hands, and possibly being used in the commission of a crime is reprehensible, and as such, those owners should be held accountable.

In fact, HB7218 could go further and could be amended to enact a true Safe Storage law similar to that in Massachusetts. The safest law is one that requires owners to lock their guns up when they are not in use or in their control or reach. CAGV is fully in support of HB7218, but the current language would not require an owner to lock up their guns when they leave their house. Current law also does not require you to keep weapons away from guests of your home or "non-residents" who might be prohibited from owning or possessing a gun. Similar to the theft concerns addressed with HB7223, we believe that HB7218 should be amended to mandate storage of weapons, regardless of who resides in the home; especially when the owner leaves his home. This would reduce gun theft and according to the previous studies cited, would reduce gun violence.



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We urge all legislators to pass HB 7218, and HB 7223 and mandate the safe storage of firearms in the home and the safe storage of handguns in unattended vehicles.

2) In Support of HB 7219-An Act Concerning Ghost Guns

As Connecticut has strengthened its gun safety laws and technologies have evolved, a growing number of people have been self-assembling homemade firearms from unregulated parts and kits. This source of guns is particularly attractive to individuals who cannot legally acquire guns in our state.

A firearm's frame or receiver/lower receiver forms the body of the weapon, holding the firearm's key components and firing action together. The frame or receiver is such an essential part of the weapon that existing federal law defines the term "firearm" to include the frame or receiver of a gun alone without any other components. However, sellers of frames and receivers have circumvented gun laws by marketing "unfinished" frames and receivers, which simply require certain holes, slots, or cavities to be drilled by the purchaser. These products, colloquially known as "80% receivers" are generally not considered firearms under state or federal law, and are therefore not subject to regulation, even though they are expressly designed to enable untrained amateurs to assemble homemade firearms. Numerous online instruction guides, and commercially available toolkits make "do-it-yourself (DIY)" assembly of weapons an alarmingly quick and easy process. They are also referred to as "ghost guns" because they contain no serial numbers, are untraceable and require no background check to purchase.

Ghost guns were the weapon of choice of a recent Northern California mass shooter in November 2017, who was prohibited from possessing firearms because of a restraining order. His rampage killed five people, including his wife, and concluded with an assault on an elementary school using semiautomatic rifles that he made himself. Other gunmen have employed the weapons as well. In 2016, a Baltimore man fired at police with a homemade AR-15. The most notable and tragic was in 2013, when a shooter built a homemade assault rifle using an unfinished receiver and embarked on a shooting spree on a Southern California college campus, resulting in six deaths including the shooter. The shooter had previously failed a firearms background check. Ghost guns appear to be most prevalent in California, where, like Connecticut, there are restrictions on assault weapons that make it difficult to buy guns that are more readily available in other states. These ghost guns have been seized in criminal investigations in Connecticut and other states, including neighboring New York. California has already passed laws to prohibit possessing or transferring such unserialized guns and requiring serial numbers for all homemade guns.

A January 2016 report to Congress by the U.S. Government Accountability Office confirmed that "[r]ecent seizures of firearms parts, firearms made with unmarked parts, and equipment used to assemble or manufacture firearms . . . suggest an emerging reliance by criminal organizations on



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this source of weapons.”¹ Law enforcement in California has been struggling to stop the proliferation of ghost guns. Graham Barlowe, an agent at the Sacramento, California, Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Bureau field office told the Wall Street Journal in January that about 250 unserialized ghost guns were seized or bought by undercover agents with his Sacramento team alone in 2017. This could easily be the case in Connecticut, if not now, then in the future.

It is impossible to know how many of these firearms have been assembled, sold, or used in violent crimes, because ghost guns are untraceable. Furthermore, because they can be sold without a background check, these weapons circumvent existing Connecticut law, creating a loophole, and easy access to firearms, for people who would be otherwise prohibited. Additionally, unlike with finished firearms, license sellers are not required to keep sales records of unfinished gun kits and components.

Opponents of the ghost gun bill considered last year claimed the “language was bad” and “vague” and that the proposed law would turn individuals into felons for just owning a block of metal. This is simply not true, and is a tragic misreading of the bill. The bill language purposely includes a specific intent element. In order to commit the crime of possession of a gun, the State would have to prove that the lower receiver was, “designed and intended to be used in the ‘assembly’ of a functional firearm.” This is a high bar to prove, and one that any State Attorney or law enforcement officer would only undertake to prove should the evidence be enough to show that a person possessed an unfinished receiver with the intent to complete a functional firearm.

The danger of ghost guns and their threat to public safety is very real. Ghost guns have been used in mass shootings, in attacks on law enforcement and have been seized in criminal investigations, including in Connecticut. So far this year, the Bridgeport Police have confiscated seven ghost guns. Bridgeport recently passed an ordinance banning the use and possession of ghost guns and 3D printed guns. The State should follow their lead.

Connecticut needs to be proactive in the passage of their laws and not be reactive or wait until after the next mass shooting happens. We urge you to pass HB 7219 to regulate the sale of unserialized guns and require the same scrutiny and safety measures with ghost guns as is required with finished firearms.

3) In Support of SB60: An Act Concerning the Presentation of A Carry Permit.

This will require individuals openly carrying a firearm in public to show their permit, that they are required to have on their person, upon the request of a law enforcement officer. A person who is hunting with a firearm, must upon request, show a valid hunting license. This is no different.

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO 16-223 report of Firearms Trafficking: US Efforts to Combat Firearms, January 2016

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