

March 12, 2024

RE In Support of H 7268- An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses—Weapons

Chairman Craven, Vice Chairs McEntee and Knight, and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to write in strong support on behalf of H 7268- An Act Related to Criminal Offenses- Weapons.

The Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families (RICCF) is comprised of forty-three member organizations who provide and/or advocate for services and resources to support and strengthen families; to address policy and practice for behavioral and physical health, special education, juvenile justice, family, and sexual violence, and to support and care for foster youth. We strive to build and maintain a strong and effective human services workforce. All of the challenges facing our state’s children, youth, and families and the organizations that serve them are made more dangerous by easy access to unlocked guns. We are therefore partnering with the Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence.

Firearms are the leading cause of death among children

As of March 11, 2024, 3030 individuals in our country have died from gun violence just this year. **47 of these were children aged 0-11 and 220 were teens 12-17.** ¹

In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death among children ages 19 and younger. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, from 2019 to 2022, the firearm death rate among children and adolescents increased by 46% (from 2.4 to 3.5 per 100,000).² **This translates to seven children per day dying by firearms in 2022.** Recent increases in firearm deaths were driven by gun assaults, which accounted for two out of three firearm deaths among children and adolescents in 2022. While suicides by firearm have accounted for at least three in ten of these deaths. The spike in youth firearm deaths during the pandemic have primarily been driven by gun assaults.³

Access to Guns is Driving up the Census of Children in the Rhode Island Training School

Violence in the community is increasing with too easy access to guns. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families is seeking to open and staff additional module at the Rhode Island Training School this year as the number of adolescents with gun charges is driving up census, including for

¹ <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-adolescents/>

² <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>

³ <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-adolescents/>

³ 2023 KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION, The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Adolescents, Nirmita Panchal, Published: Oct 14, 2022

youth as young as 12 or 13. The cost to those young people and the state of our inaction to control gun access is significant and growing.

Gun violence can adversely affect the mental health and well-being of children.

The insidious reach of gun violence extends beyond physical harm, affecting the very fabric of our children's mental health and well-being. Exposure to firearms, whether through domestic violence, unsecured storage at home, or the specter of violence in neighborhoods and schools, leaves lasting scars. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and a myriad of other mental health challenges plague our youth, often leading to increased risks of substance abuse and diminished academic performance, including increased absenteeism and difficulty concentrating.”⁴

Research has found that access to firearms, particularly in the home, is a risk factor for suicide deaths among children and adolescents. According to Kaiser, “Nearly half of suicide attempts occur within 10 minutes of the current suicide thought, further underscoring access to firearms as a risk factor for suicide.” [Making guns more difficult to access through safe storage is certainly one solution.](#)

We thank the committee for your consideration of this critical legislation and strongly urge your support of H7268.

Sincerely,



Tanja Kubas-Meyer
Executive Director

⁴ <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-adolescents/#:~:text=Research%20has%20found%20that%20access,a%20risk%20factor%20for%20suicide.>