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Testimony Re: House Bill 7373, An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses – Weapons
House Judiciary Committee
March 13, 2024
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would like to thank Governor McKee, Lieutenant Governor Matos, Secretary of State Amore, General Treasurer Diossa, and Attorney General Neronha for their strong support of this legislation. We would also like to thank Representative Caldwell for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Knight, Fellela, Batista, Boylan, Kazarian, Fogarty, Stewart, McEntee, and Handy for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 7373, which would require the safe storage of firearms and would provide civil and criminal penalties for violations as well as require firearms dealers to post informational signs regarding safe storage and add rifles and shotguns to the type of firearms requiring a trigger lock be included with purchase.

Firearm related injuries remain the leading cause of death in the U.S. among children and youth ages one to 19, surpassing motor vehicle deaths. Nationally and in Rhode Island, gun reform remains a key area of focus, especially in the wake of the devastating mass shootings in schools, banks, grocery stores, parks, and the other places we walk into daily. We would like to thank the General Assembly for passing several common-sense measures to protect Rhode Islanders from senseless gun violence in 2022, and the continued work of the General Assembly to keep our children and families safe. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT believes these comprehensive state policies to reduce gun violence can be expanded to help **increase the safety of children in Rhode Island, and House Bill 7373 is a practical step to reduce senseless gun injuries and deaths.**

Gun-Related Emergency Department (ED) Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Among Children and Youth, Rhode Island, 2018-2022

AGE	# OF ED VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS
1 to 14	34	<5	0
15 to 17	50	<5	<5
18 to 19	63	10	7
TOTAL	147	17	11

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2018-2022.

In Rhode Island between 2018 and 2022, there were 147 emergency department visits, 17 hospitalizations, and 11 deaths of children and youth for gun-related injuries.

This legislation would encourage families to store guns safely, which would reduce the likelihood of a child being injured, hospitalized, or killed by a gun that he or she has found unlocked and unsecured. It would also reduce the likelihood

that a child, teen, or adult could gain access to a gun and use it to take his or her own life, a risk that is particularly urgent with the increase in depression and suicidality we have seen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Preventing access to guns is an important safety measure in preventing firearm related injuries and death among children and youth. **The presence and availability of a gun is strongly associated with adolescent suicide risk.** In the U.S., firearms are the reported cause of death in one third of suicides among youth ages 10 to 14 and half of all suicides among those 20 to 24. Approximately 80% of firearm-related suicides take place in the home of the youth or a relative, with the firearm belonging to a member of the household in 90% of cases. Keeping guns unloaded and locked, as well as storing and locking ammunition separately, reduces the risk of gun-related injury and death by suicide or homicide.

Additionally, in the U.S., 67% of shooters in child unintentional firearm fatalities were either playing with or showing the firearm to another person when it discharged. Among child firearm fatalities with known storage information, firearms were often stored loaded (74% of cases) and unlocked (76% of cases).

The safe storage of guns is an American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommended public policy to prevent firearm related injuries and death. We strongly urge you to pass House Bill 7373, which would require gun owners to store guns securely in locked containers equipped with tamper-resistant mechanical locks engaged to make the guns inoperable.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.