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To:

The Honorable Members of the Rhode Island House of Representatives
The Honorable Members of the Rhode Island Senate
The Honorable Members of the House Judiciary Committee
The Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Letter in Support of Amending H7373 to be Named Dillon's Safe Storage Law

Dear honorable Representatives,

Good afternoon, thank you for sponsoring or supporting H7373, the Safe Storage Bill. I'm writing this letter in support of amending this bill to be named Dillon's Safe Storage Law. The tragic story of Dillon Veins and his senseless loss at the hands of an unsecured firearm needs to be properly memorialized and honored in Rhode Island state law as a powerful teaching moment. Meeting David Veins, Dillon's father, in 2023 illuminated the harsh reality that too many local children are exposed to unsecured firearms, with his son sadly becoming another heartbreaking memorandum when a delinquent owner's negligence allowed a gun to circulate among intoxicated minors. While David's noble efforts to enshrine his son's name in legislation initially garnered community support as a way to inform parents, this year he is disheartened by the absence of that crucial context in the current bill up for vote.

Meeting Dillon Veins in 2023 and learning of the initiative to memorialize his son's name and story into Rhode Island law shed light on the reality today where youth are exposed to unsecured firearms too often in our cities and towns. He is somehow not the only parent I have met to be challenged by this, and his son is certainly not the only youth exposed to unsecured firearms. Dillon wants to memorialize his son's story so that people understand this law is to protect youth from gun violence. Dillon's son perished because an unsecured firearm had been passed around numerous intoxicated minors by a delinquent owner. Memorializing this story can convey a powerful lesson while passing this law.

This year, Dillon is entirely disheartened by the absence of his son's name from H7373. Last year, Dillon Veins had rallied for the passage of his son's namesake law, with the community standing behind him. Memorializing his son's name into state law to tell this story and inform parents was a noble way to honor his son. This year, with the absence of his son's

name from the legislation of 2024, the people standing behind Dillon are asking him about the absence of his son's name. We still believe in the law, as the man who owned the unsecured firearm stands to get five years if it manages to pass before the ruling.

I am concerned about the absence from the legislation as it passes the House without the presence of Dillon's story. Memorializing the story of Dillon Veins, lost due to irresponsible and unsecured storage of firearms, can teach those who read about it how great laws are protecting Americans from gunfire. As this bill leaves committee and heads to the House floor for a vote, will the media tell the story of Dillon and the lack of safe storage that led to his name being memorialized in Rhode Island state law or not? Rhode Island might see that this law passed without an amendment, and it will fail to properly honor the story of Dillon Veins.

Protecting local youth from unsecured firearms is a powerful message, yet without Dillon's story, that message is lost in translation. Dillon's story should be front and center as the House votes on this bill. I want the news to show America the passage of this law protecting youth from unsecured firearms, alongside Dillon Veins telling his story with Moms Demand Action, the governor, and the representatives sponsoring this bill, conveying the importance of protecting youth. Throughout my life, I have held and fired unsecured firearms and spoken to youth wielding unsecured illegal firearms. I have sat in the home of a man who allowed multiple teenagers to wield the firearm that they handed me, instructing me not to point it at them. I pointed it at them because they needed a reality check. "Guns are not toys, don't play with them. We don't want to lose any of You." I said to the five young persons sitting at the table. While giving counsel to my friend, a resident of this home, I learned a teenager had previously perished there, and renovations had been completed in one of those rooms. Memorializing the story of Dillon Veins will help parents in Rhode Island understand the importance of securing their firearms and ensure local parents don't face this tragedy in the future.

The judge prosecuting the person who wielded the unsecured firearm could rule on this case in the hours after it becomes law. This would result in the owner of the firearm that was possessed by intoxicated minors for numerous months receiving four years in jail, six months for each of the eight unsecured firearms passed among these teenagers. The man guilty of this crime does not want to serve the one-year current law empowers the judge to convey. The man guilty of this crime concurs with the judge that he deserves four years, and he wields the moral high ground to say that Dillon Veins deserves to see him imprisoned for four years. This example should be set so that the people have an illustration of this law in action as they maneuver to secure their firearms.

As this crucial bill approaches the Governor's desk and faces votes in the Rhode Island House and Senate, it is imperative that Dillon Veins' powerful story remains at the heart of the legislation, with a proper memorandum. His son's senseless death, the result of a delinquent gun owner's negligence, cannot be just a statistic - it must serve as a searing call to action. By explicitly memorializing Dillon's tragedy in the language of the law, we enshrine Dillon's story to protect other youth from such preventable violence. His disheartening absence from the

current text fails to include Dillon's memory and vacates the bill's ability to convey the importance of protecting local youth from unsecured firearms. Alternatively, with Dillon's story resonating in context, this statute can become a legacy honoring his son's memory. As the Governor prepares to sign this into law, including Dillon's story is the right way to honor Dillon, and will ensure the legislation's history will reverberate across Rhode Island, so that we may learn from Dillon's loss. His son's name etched into the statute will compel every gun owner to secure their weapons, preventing more families from suffering the same unimaginable loss. Dillon Veins has championed this reform through immeasurable grief - the least we can do is guarantee his son's fight against gun negligence permanently echoes through all who consider this law.

In anticipation of historical change,
Micheal Tillinghast