

STOP GUN VIOLENCE: SAFE STORAGE

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STOP GUN VIOLENCE: SAFE STORAGE

TUESDAY, MAY 25, 2021

UNITED STATES SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CONSTITUTION,
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:54 p.m., in Room 226, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Senator Richard Blumenthal, Chair of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Blumenthal [presiding], Feinstein, Whitehouse, Ossoff, Cruz, Cornyn, Lee, and Sasse.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Chair BLUMENTHAL. The Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution hearing today will come to order. I thank all of our witnesses for being here. Ranking Member Cruz coming straight from the vote. I apologize for the delay, but we had a vote, and I thank also the witnesses who are participating remotely today.

Before we begin the hearing, let me just take a moment to recognize that today is the 1-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, the recent guilty verdict. A lot of events that have occurred in this past year provide necessary accountability. But it isn't true accountability, and it isn't true justice. Justice would be for George Floyd to be here, alive, today. True justice, equality, and equity require real action and real change in policing, and, all across our society, elimination of racism, wherever it exists.

There's a lot of work to do. The Subcommittee on the Constitution will have a part in it, so will our entire Senate. We need to move forward with action to match this moment of reckoning for our country.

We're here this afternoon for our third hearing on another critical issue facing our country involved in stopping the epidemic of gun violence that claims more than 100 lives every day in the United States of America. In our first two hearings, we covered red flag laws and ghost guns. And now we're turning to safe storage.

Ethan's Law, which I introduced in this Congress, would be a vital step forward toward stopping unintentional shootings that occur every day in this country. In fact, nearly every day, there is an unintentional shooting by a child. Last month in Texas, in Houston, a 3-year-old accidentally shot and killed his 8-month-old brother. Last January, police in Murray, Utah, reported that a 3-year-old was accidentally shot in the head when he woke up before

his parents, climbed onto a counter, and started playing with a gun. In both of these cases, the gun was unsecured.

In the worst of these kinds of tragedies, someone loses a life. In many, the shooter, a child, has to live the rest of their life knowing they killed someone, frequently a close family member. Those shootings tear apart families every day in America.

In addition to the unintentional shootings, there are the suicides, 700 of them every day, involving children dying by gun suicide, often using guns belonging to a family member. Seven hundred every year. The risk of youth suicide is far greater when a gun is accessible. In fact, one study found that the best indicator of a State's youth suicide rate is, quote, "household gun ownership." We will hear more about that issue from our witnesses today.

Securing firearms also will reduce firearms shootings in our schools. Roughly 75 percent of incidents of gunfire on school grounds involve a shooter who has obtained a weapon at a home, in the home of a friend or relative. We know about that phenomenon in Connecticut all too well, from the Sandy Hook massacre.

Safe storage laws save lives. It's that simple. Safe storage laws are needed to protect our Nation's children. Eight children every day are unintentionally injured or killed due to an unsecured gun in the home. Let me repeat that. Eight children, every day, in the greatest country in the history of the world, are killed unintentionally, or injured, by a gun unsafely stored in a home.

Forty percent of households with guns are unsafely stored. Nearly one-quarter of parents whose children admitted handling guns didn't know their kids had done so. The stark fact is, there is no way to undo the damage. The death and tragedies that result once a gun is fired, whether it's unsafely stored in a gun in the first place.

Today, we'll hear from Kristin Song about the enduring and permanent pain and loss an unsecured firearm can cause. She's joined by her husband, Mike. Her story of her loss of their 15-year-old son, Ethan, to an accidental shooting with an unsecured gun, I think, will move the Nation. In 2019, heeding their heartfelt call to—call to action, Connecticut enacted Ethan's Law, with bipartisan support, to require that gun owners safely and securely store their firearms.

To Kristin and Mike, I just want to say, we are not done. We will not be done until we pass Ethan's Law in the United States Congress. Your being here today means the world. We're going to do everything we can to pass Ethan's Law, and I ask my colleagues across the aisle, as well as on our side, to help us do it.

Of particular interest, I hope, to my colleagues, are the 33 States, including Texas, that have already adopted some form of safe storage access law. It's on the books in those States. It varies from State to State, but what we need is a national standard now. There is a reason that those States have passed those laws, because they work. They work to prevent deaths and injury.

Quote, "Unloaded firearms can be secured with a firearm-locking device to make them safe, inoperable. Unloaded firearms also can be stored in a locked cabinet, safe, firearm vault, or storage case." That's a quote from the National Shooting Sports Foundation in-

struction to gun owners. Thank you, Mr. Bartozzi, for being here today and for the program that NSSF sponsors.

Quote, “That strong locks, strong boxes, and security cases are inexpensive and give quick access to firearms in a defensive situation,” end quote. Quote, “Gun safes are the most secure storage option,” end quote. That is from the NRA, in August of 2020, in an article entitled, “Five Tips to Safely Store Your Guns.”

There is no question that guns should be safely stored. On all sides of this issue, there is a consensus. The disagreement is only whether there should be a law requiring it. My colleagues, the groups on all sides, agree that it should be done. The opponents just don’t want anyone to tell them to do it. They agree it’s—that gun owners responsibly should keep their guns safely stored. They just don’t want a mandate. We know this issue is one of public safety, where we always, when it’s a matter of life and death, accept legal requirement.

Airbags. Seatbelts. Everybody agrees, a matter of public safety. That’s why we require them. Keeping prescription drugs out of the hands of children, we agree that it should be done, and we have laws requiring childproof containers.

Some say that safe storage laws are unconstitutional, but they’ve been upheld across the country. Some say that safe storage will make it impossible to use firearms in self-defense, but modern safes with digital or biometric controls make it as easy to unlock as it is your phone. We can disagree about the details, but the recognition is unanimous, or virtually so, that we must work together to pass a measure at the Federal level, unanimous among people who believe in gun safety and stopping gun violence because these injuries and deaths are preventable. If we choose to act, we must act.

I, again, thank you for being here today. I turn to the Ranking Member.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TED CRUZ,
A U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS**

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to each of the witnesses that are here today. Every responsible gun owner knows that safely storing their firearms is critical. Heidi and I store our firearms safely, and we expect that everyone with a firearm in their home should do the same.

We also know that when firearms are not stored responsibly, there can be tragic consequences. Senator Blumenthal spoke about Ethan Song, a 15-year-old boy who fatally shot himself, by accident, with a firearm that was stored at a friend’s house. For all of us, our hearts go out to the entire family. Ms. Song, thank you for being here. Thank you for telling your son’s story. As a parent, what you experienced is a nightmare that terrifies every parent.

All of us want to avoid tragedies like that happening in the future. At the same time, firearms in the home can be critical for defending the home. It can be critical for defending members of the family from violent crime. One example of that, that we will hear from today, occurred on November 5, 2017, when a vicious murderer walked into the sanctuary at Sutherland Springs First Baptist Church in Texas and started shooting innocent churchgoers.

Stephen Willeford, who I have since gotten to know quite well and who will be a witness today, Mr. Willeford was a neighbor just down the street, and he heard the shots. He went and got his weapon, which is an AR-15, and he ran down the street, and engaged with the shooter. His heroism saved lives that day. His heroism was extraordinary. I can tell you, I was in that sanctuary the day after that shooting, and it remains one of the most horrific things I have ever seen to stand in that beautiful church, where a deranged madman committed an act of unspeakable evil.

Mr. Willeford's weapon was secured in a gun safe, and the time it took for him to remove it from the gun safe slowed down his response time. One of the challenges that we all face is a slowed-down response time in an instance like that can mean the difference between people living and people dying.

All across the country, people rely on quick access to firearms in their homes to defend themselves. A 2013 report ordered by the Obama administration CDC, stated that, quote, "Almost all national survey estimates indicate that defensive gun uses by victims are at least as common as offensive uses by criminals, with estimates of annual uses ranging from 500,000 to more than 3 million." We're not talking about one, or two, or a handful. This is the Obama administration estimating defensive uses of firearms. In other words, firearms used to prevent a crime, occur somewhere between 500,000 and 3 million times a year.

If our objective is to save lives, and I believe all of us want to save lives, ensuring that people can effectively access their firearms to defend themselves and their families is critically important. Sometimes, the defensive use includes children defending themselves and defending their families. For example, earlier this year, a 12-year-old boy in Goldsboro, North Carolina, shot two masked intruders, killing one of them, after they forcefully entered his home and shot the boy's grandmother.

In 2018, a 15-year-old girl, who was also from North Carolina, and who had been trained on how to shoot and safely handle firearms, grabbed a gun hidden in her house for protection and shot her mother's abusive boyfriend, after he had attacked her mother and threatened to kill her. If the firearms that these minors had used to defend themselves and their families had been inaccessible, the consequences could very well have been devastating.

When we talk about safe storage, we have to keep in mind that restricting quick and ready access to a firearm potentially comes at a serious cost to people's lives. We should be encouraging people to make responsible choices that balance the risk of accidents with the need for self-defense.

That's exactly what many of the voluntary programs across the country have been doing. For example, Project Child Safe, run by the National Shooting Sports Foundation, provides gun locks free of charge. I will tell you this is an issue on which there can be bipartisan cooperation.

When it comes to Project Child Safe, it so happens that I have a very personal history with that project, because in the years 1999 and 2000, I was a policy staffer, working on the George W. Bush Presidential campaign. As a policy staffer responsible for domestic policy, I was the 28-, 29-year-old staffer who designed the very first

Project Child Safe, and drafted the briefing paper, and presented it to then-Governor Bush. Governor Bush agreed and campaigned for President, in 2000, on Project Child Safe on providing gun locks, free of charge, to the millions of Americans who don't have gun locks so that they can better protect themselves, their families, their children, the friends of their children.

That project ended up being announced, campaigned upon, and when George W. Bush was elected, implemented. Today, Mr. Bartozzi works very directly with it. I have to say it is encouraging, now, the millions of child locks that have been given out that came from an idea a 29-year-old kid had sitting in a cubicle, that has since been implemented.

Critical to that is that it is voluntary, that it is providing child locks, so you have the equipment, free of charge, so the cost is not a barrier to being able to lock a firearm, but it is not mandatory. I believe people can and should make a judgment about what the needs of their home, of their neighborhood, and protecting their family are.

The bill that Senator Blumenthal has, I think, goes too far in terms of mandating a Federal rule for everyone. For example, the bill would prevent a family with teenaged children in a crime-ridden neighborhood from choosing to keep a firearm somewhere where it could be quickly and easily accessed for self-defense. It would empower the Federal Government to enforce that law, coming into the family's home, and potentially arresting the parents and seizing the firearm.

Not only that, it would make it a Federal crime for the children I mentioned earlier, the children who defended their homes and defended their families with a firearm, to have access to the weapons that saved them and their loved ones. I don't think that makes sense. I don't think that's an approach—

And by the way, whether or not children have access to firearms, I think, varies widely, depending on the age and maturity of the child. It is a different thing for a parent of a 16- or 17-year-old child at home who's trained in how to handle a firearm, making the decision that that child should be able to defend himself or herself in the case of a violent intruder, than it is to allow elementary school kids to play with loaded firearms. There's a full spectrum that responsible parents should make judgments of when it is appropriate and when it is not appropriate to put a minor in a position to be able to defend himself or herself.

All of us want to prevent firearm accidents. It is tragic. It is horrific. I can tell you, in our home, our girls are 10 and 13, and our firearms are locked away, and they don't have access to them, because we're not at a point where we think that is a reasonable judgment to make, but I don't know that there would never be a point where we would make the judgment that it makes sense to give them access to it if needed.

I think there's a lot we can do as a voluntary matter. I think there's a lot we can do with education. I think there's a lot we can do encouraging the use of safe storage. I also think we have an overlay of civil liability laws that if you have individuals that are behaving irresponsibly, they face potentially enormous civil liabil-

ity. But I don't believe a Federal, criminal mandate is the right approach to this issue.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Cruz. We've been joined by Senator Whitehouse. Thank you for joining us. I'm going to introduce the witnesses, and then we'll—I will swear them in, as is the custom on the Judiciary Committee. Then we'll have your testimony.

Kristin Song is from Guilford, Connecticut. She became a gun safety activist after her 15-year-old son, Ethan, was killed with an unsecured gun in a neighbor's house. When she learned that the negligent gun owner would not be charged, Ms. Song was determined to strengthen Connecticut's safe storage law. Her approach in the Connecticut State Legislature was instrumental, in fact, decisive, in bringing together lawmakers from both sides of the aisle to find common ground and help kids—keep kids safe.

Ms. Song's advocacy was instrumental in passing Ethan's Law in Connecticut. In 2019, she and her husband, Mike, created the Ethan Miller Song Foundation to honor the causes that were important to Ethan: veterans, animals, standing up for those who are vulnerable or marginalized.

Mr. Stephen Willeford is a native of Sutherland Springs, Texas. An avid sportsman, he began shooting at a young age, and honed his skills by participating in competition as he grew older. He made sure his three children were trained in gun safety, passing along his expertise. Following the deadly mass shooting in Sutherland Springs in November 2017, Mr. Willeford became known as, quote, "the good guy with a gun," end quote, having disrupted the shooter. Stephen credits his faith and preparedness as to why he was able to step in during the critical accident to that training.

Dr. Maya Haasz is a board-certified pediatric emergency medicine physician at Children's Hospital, Colorado, and an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. She's a researcher focused on firearm injury prevention and founded and chair—chairs the Firearm Injury Prevention Collaborative at Children's Hospital in Colorado.

Joe Bartozzi is president and CEO of the National Shooting Sports Foundation and the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute. He also serves as chairman of the Project Child Safe Foundation. He has spent roughly 40 years in a variety of technical and executive management roles in the manufacturing sector.

Dr. Ted Bonar is a clinical psychologist and director of End Family Fire at Brady, and executive director at Clinical Readiness Project. He's a nationally recognized trainer and speaker at conferences and universities, and he's known as a subject-matter expert in suicide prevention, lethal means safety, military and veteran mental health concerns, and PTSD.

I'll ask all the witnesses to please stand and raise your right arm.

[Witnesses are sworn in.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Let's begin with Kristin Song.

**STATEMENT OF KRISTIN SONG,
GUILFORD, CONNECTICUT**

Ms. SONG. Good afternoon, Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Cruz, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you so much for inviting me.

I once knew a woman. Her eyes sparkled. Her posture was relaxed, her movements deliberate and full of energy. She smiled, laughed, and loved to tell anyone who would listen, "Seize the day." She lived her life that way. The pleasures in her life were her family, and her greatest joys were her children. Her heart was full of gratitude.

Her children grew into teenagers, and she fell more in love with them, even when she received phone calls, "Mom. I'm okay, but the car is totaled. Mom, don't freak out, but I broke my nose in three places at baseball practice." Or when the school called to inquire if her third child was planning on handing in any homework, ever. She understood these were trials and rites of passage. They were surmountable and good learning lessons for her children.

I saw that woman on January 31, 2018. She and her son had a fun and relaxing morning together. He got his braces off, and he was so happy. She took a picture of him with his new smile and sent it off to her husband. They headed off to breakfast to celebrate, and her beautiful boy told her about his hopes and his dreams. He wanted to go to Rice University, join the Army, marry, and have seven children.

They returned home, and her beautiful boy walked to his best friend's house. An hour later, the woman saw two police officers walking across her lawn. Her heart sank. She heard the ambulance scream by her street, carrying her beautiful boy.

They raced to the hospital, praying that their beautiful boy was still alive. She ran into the hospital and headed toward the bays, where her beautiful boy lay. But she was stopped and guided to a tiny room. The ER doctor slid down the wall, put his head in his hands, and whispered, "Your beautiful boy is gone." She crawled into a fetal position. She just wanted to disappear.

Her husband called their daughter and son. She will never forget the raw, guttural sobs that escaped from their mouths. She begged to see him. She needs to tell him again that he is so loved and cherished, to kiss his forehead, to tuck him in one last time. She was the first to welcome him into this world, and she wanted to be the last to say goodbye.

The doctor chokes out, "He's unrecognizable," even to her eyes. While her family walks out of the hospital, her beautiful boy is being wheeled to the morgue. The woman and her family sit in silence on the car ride home. There's nothing to say. You can't fix death.

I saw that woman on February 1, 2018. Her eyes are dull. Her posture, slumped. Her movements, as if by rote. She's in a stupor. Her smile has turned to tears. Her energy is gone. The pain that she feels is similar to holding your hand over a hot flame, intense, unrelenting pain. She can barely breathe. She doesn't sleep much, and when she does, he calls to her. She frantically tries to reach him, but he slips through her fingers and slowly fades away.

She would have had traded—she would have traded places with him in an instant. She would have laid down her life to save his. She sits with her coffee in the kitchen and contemplates suicide. No more pain. But her other son grabs her hand and says, “I would not survive if I lost another member of this family.” How did he know? Was it so obvious? She now knows she has no other choice but to live.

My name is Kristin Song, and I am that woman. The beautiful boy was my 15-year-old son, Ethan. He was shot in the head in his best friend’s house with an unsecured gun. He had zero chance of survival. The father, the gun owner, stored his three guns and bullets in a shoe box.

What would you do never to be asked these questions by a funeral director: “Do you want to bury or cremate your child? Or do you want a lock of their hair? I’m sorry, that is all that I can offer you.”

To avoid having to answer those questions, would you use a biometric safe that opens in just a few seconds, just to secure your guns? I wanted to thank all of the gun owners, especially Senator Cruz, who secures their weapons, because Ethan would have been safe in your house. He would have walked out of your home and into my arms.

While I applaud all of the organizations that emphasize that it is the gun owner’s personal responsibility to secure their guns, that is clearly not enough. If it were, I would not be here today. I would be home with my son, running around, looking for his lacrosse uniform that always seemed to be lost, peppering him with questions about his day, and stopping by his bedroom at night to let him know that I love him.

We need laws, like Ethan’s Law, to mandate safe storage and save lives. The gun owner could have saved Ethan’s—the gun owner could have saved Ethan in the time it takes to draw one breath by simply locking up his guns. If he had, my beautiful boy, with his infectious smile, would be walking across the stage to accept his high school diploma next month. Instead, that night, while his friends are throwing their caps into the air, I will be sitting at Ethan’s grave, and the only one speaking his name will be me.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Song appears as a submission for the record.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Mr. Willeford joins us remotely, and I’d like to call on him now.

STATEMENT OF STEPHEN WILLEFORD, SUTHERLAND SPRINGS, TEXAS

Mr. WILLEFORD. Hello. My name is Stephen Willeford. I’m from Sutherland Springs, Texas. I’m here to tell you about decisions made on November 5, 2017, and the consequences of those decisions. This is the hardest statement that I will ever make in my life.

I have been a gun owner all of my life. I own a safe because I thought it was the responsible thing to do. I kept my rifles and my handguns locked away because nothing bad happens in my town, until it did.

On November 5, 2017, an evil man opened fire into the First Baptist Church, Sutherland Springs, where 49 of my friends were gathered to worship. This man brought a vehicle full of firearms and ammunition that he obtained because the government failed to enforce its own pre-existing laws.

When I recognized what was going—what I was hearing was gunshots, I flew into action. Imagine yourself running down the hallway to your house and fumbling with a lock on your safe. Imagine hearing each shot ringing through the air, knowing that one of your community members is on the receiving end of each bullet, knowing that you're not fast enough.

I grabbed my AR-15. I grabbed a handful of ammunition, eight rounds. I ran to my front door, loading the gun as I ran. How much time had I taken? I timed it now, it's about 2 minutes. I could have shaved—saved 90 seconds off if my firearm had been loaded and not locked behind a giant, steel door. I timed that too. 90 seconds does not sound like a lot, but to me, it will always be the longest 90 seconds in my lifetime, and my greatest regret.

The police officers in our county are some of the best. They did everything they could to respond to the active shooter. But as Chris Byrd wrote, "When seconds count, police are only minutes away." It took 19 minutes for the police to make it across the county to our town. After the first 911 call, every second counted. It was my community—I was my community's first responder. I didn't even pause to put on my shoes.

The gunfire continued. I yelled as I drew closer, and the shooter heard me. My voice made him stop killing my neighbors and face me. Seconds before I heard—before he heard me, he shot Kris Workman in the spine, paralyzing him from the waist down. If I had had my firearm ready, would this young husband and father still be able to walk today? I had never asked who was shot before Kris. I can't bear to know.

Forty-nine people went to church that morning. Twenty-six didn't make it out alive. Not one person walked out of the church without an injury. Firearms did not commit this atrocity. Don't get this story wrong. Evil did this. My firearm stopped it in its tracks. How much faster would I had been able to respond, if I had my gun ready?

In contrast, let me tell you about April Evans. April Evans is a young mother from Virginia. One night, when April was home alone with her 2-year-old daughter, a criminal began busting her door down. April had her gun. She called out, warning him, but he didn't stop. As he burst into her house, April fired, brought him down, and held him at gunpoint until the police arrived.

Imagine if April had not—had to fumble with a safe. Imagine if politicians had passed a law mandating that April was not allowed to do what she did, was—had to have it in a locked safe. Would she have had time to protect her daughter and herself? There are a lot of things that we can learn from these stories.

First is the importance of the Second Amendment.

Second is the importance of preparedness.

No one thinks that something like this can happen in their communities, but it can. I will always be haunted by those 90 seconds wasted, getting my gun from the safe and loading it. I will never

again keep my firearms unloaded in a safe. Whether or not this law passes, I will not comply. I won't make that mistake again. It came at too high of a cost.

The answer to our problem is not restrictions. It's an informed public. It's in educating kids on gun safety from an early age. Government stepping into individuals' homes and dictating how they can act in each circumstance, legislating how they are allowed to defend themselves and their families will not end well.

We, as individuals, are responsible for the decisions we make in our own homes. We have that right. Our Government is there to protect and support that right, not legislate it.

Each of you made a promise when you were sworn into our office. When people ask me how many lives I think I saved that day, my answer is always the same: not nearly enough.

I want to thank the United States Senate and this Committee for allowing me to speak today.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Willeford appears as a submission for the record.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Mr. Willeford. We're going to go to Dr. Haasz.

**STATEMENT OF DR. MAYA HAASZ, ASSISTANT
PROFESSOR, PEDIATRICS-EMERGENCY MEDICINE,
CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL COLORADO ANSCHUTZ
MEDICAL CAMPUS, AURORA, COLORADO**

Dr. HAASZ. Thank you, Chairman Blumenthal and the Members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Dr. Maya Haasz, and I'm here today representing Children's Hospital, Colorado, and the Colorado Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Dr. Haasz, I think you need to press your microphone button. Thank you.

Dr. HAASZ. Sorry. That's better? Thank you, Chairman Blumenthal and Members of this Subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Dr. Maya Haasz, and I'm here today representing Children's Hospital, Colorado, and the Colorado Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

I've been a pediatric emergency medicine physician for 10 years now. In that time, I've seen many firearm injuries, including in children as young as 2 years old, which could have been prevented by safe storage requirements. The lucky ones survive with any number of visible scars, to carry along with the emotional and psychological trauma that they and their families carry forward. Those who do not survive leave behind a world of grief. The cry of a parent whose toddler died is agonizing in any circumstance. When that child has been fatally shot in a preventable accident, the added layers of guilt and what if add a new, almost tangible layer of pain for all involved.

Firearms are the second leading cause of death in children in the United States. On average, more than 17 children are injured by a firearm every single day. On average, more than 32 die every week in the United States. Something has to be done to protect our kids from the dangers of unsecured firearms.

I thought about this a few months ago when a 14-year-old came to the emergency department after a suicide attempt by drug overdose. Minutes after his attempt, he felt a moment of remorse and told his parents what had happened. They called an ambulance. They brought him to us. We took care of him, and he survived. This same story happens multiple times a week in my emergency department. After receiving medical and emotional help, suicidal patients get another chance at life, and the vast majority do not go on to die by suicide. But firearms are uniquely lethal. I knew that that 14-year-old boy probably wouldn't be there for us to help had he used a gun.

More than 90 percent of those who attempt suicide with a firearm do not have the chance to change their mind. For adolescents, over 80 percent of these firearms are found in their home, and most belong to a parent. These are the realities that I see play out in my line of work every day.

Over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated my job somewhat. I had to learn ever-changing processes and keep pace with new evidence. But COVID also showed us what's possible when research and public awareness are combined to save lives. As the pandemic progressed, we got better at treating patients, and the community stepped up to stop the spread. Now there's less fear and uncertainty, and we are so far ahead of where we were.

This needs to happen with gun violence too. The idea that we could solve these problems in this manner isn't new. In fact, we see it in many industries. Look at the auto industry. When a greater emphasis was put on researching the effectiveness of seatbelts and improving car safety standards, new data-driven safety requirements reduced deaths for motor vehicle collisions for minors by 38 percent between 2007 and 2016. In that same time, the rate of firearm-related mortality among children and adolescents stayed the same.

What's the difference here? When it comes to firearm-related deaths, there is a distinct lack of data-supported public health interventions that is supported by State, local, and Federal Governments, and particularly as it relates to safe storage.

Reducing firearm deaths is not just a public health issue, it's a public health emergency, and we have a duty, to ourselves and to our children, to act. We have a road map. We need to do what we did to decrease deaths from COVID-19 and for motor vehicle collisions. We didn't resort to drastic measures such as removing all the cars from the road. We identified ways to make commonsense changes that have a meaningful impact, and the same can be done with firearms.

Firearms sales are on the rise, and 4.6 million children in the United States live in homes with at least one loaded and unlocked firearm, putting them at higher risk of shootings. Curious toddlers are at risk. Individuals experiencing crises with access to firearms are in serious danger, as are women and children vulnerable to domestic abuse. For them, home can't be a refuge until we act.

Federal law doesn't require gun owners to securely store their firearms when children are present in the home. Twenty-nine States—or now it's 33—and the District of Columbia have some

form of law to do so, and many have seen suicide and unintentional gun deaths and injuries among minors drop by up to 54 percent.

Because of my experiences, I testified in March before the Colorado State Legislature to support such a law, which was thankfully enacted. I urge the Members of this Subcommittee to consider and act upon similar legislation at the national level, including Chairman Blumenthal's bill, Ethan's Law, which would set a national standard for the storage of firearms in residences where children live, and Chairman Blumenthal's Safe Gun Storage Act, which would establish consumer product safety standards for firearm locks and firearm safes.

I'm here for the 5-year-old boy who is paralyzed from the waist down by a stray bullet that struck him while he was just playing outside, and now has to come to the emergency department every time he has a fever. I'm here for the toddler who came to our hospital, shot while playing with her sibling, for her family who will agonize over her death, and whether they could have prevented it. I'm here for the youth, who in their moment of crisis, found a gun to use in their suicide attempt. They usually don't make it to their—to our hospital.

I wish I could share their names or their stories, or more of their face—or their faces so you could understand that these could be your neighbors, your grandchildren, your children that I'm trying to protect. I know that the vast majority of gun owners keep their firearms safely away from children and adolescents; however, too many do not. Keeping children safe should not be—from firearms should not be a personal choice. I implore you to pass legislation that will ensure that firearms are properly locked so that children do not have access to them. No more broken families. No more needless injuries and deaths.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Haasz appears as a submission for the record.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very much. Mr. Bartozzi.

**STATEMENT OF JOSEPH BARTOZZI, PRESIDENT
AND CEO, NATIONAL SHOOTING SPORTS
FOUNDATION, NEWTOWN, CONNECTICUT**

Mr. BARTOZZI. Thank you, Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Cruz, Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Joe Bartozzi. I'm the president and CEO of the National Shooting Sports Foundation. I'm very proud to be here today to speak on this important topic.

First of all, let me start by saying that no family should have to suffer the loss of a loved one in such a preventable tragedy as this, and we really feel bad. Especially being from Connecticut, I'm well-aware of the situation with the Song family, and it's a terrible thing that nobody should have to endure.

But I will tell you this, that it is my personal commitment and the commitment of our industry, to educate and spread the word about safe storage, while at the same time respecting the right to keep and bear arms, and appreciating and acknowledging that every circumstance surrounding the ownership and storage of firearms is unique.

To be clear on our position, we support the safe storage of firearms when they're not being used. In fact, we are outspoken advocates for safe storage, and we spend considerable time and energy creating the most comprehensive safe storage program in the world, which is Project Child Safe, as was mentioned earlier. However, we do oppose a Federal mandate, which would alienate gun owners, infringe upon State efforts in this area, impair the ability of armed self-defense, and create a new, vague, virtually unenforceable Federal law replete with legal implications and penalties.

Now again, I will reiterate that we are terribly saddened by the fact that the firearm that Ethan found was not secured. Okay? But I can tell you, this is exactly why Project Child Safe was created in the first place. It specifically addresses the issue of accidents, misuse, and suicide by identifying several storage options to fit a wide variety of lifestyles.

And I will say this, on a personal note, that we can take some solace that no organization has done more in this area than has Project Child Safe. Forty million Americans are safer today because of Project Child Safe. Just for those that may not be aware, I'll just touch on a few key points.

Since 1999, Project Child Safe has given away more than 40 million locks and safety kits. We've partnered with more than 15,000 law enforcement and community partners, in all 50 States and U.S. territories, to spread the message of safe firearm storage. That doesn't include the millions that come to our website to download our pledges, our materials, and view our videos, to enhance safe storage in the home. In fact, in the past 20 years, fatal accidents involving a firearm have declined by 40 percent. The entire industry is behind this effort, and they're all part of making this thing possible.

As an outgrowth of Project Child Safe, we are now actively involved in suicide prevention space, partnering with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, as well as the Department of Veteran Affairs, to bring suicide prevention messaging and safe storage to everyone everywhere. We have now documents and handouts in all States at firearm retailers and ranges, to prevent suicides from firearms.

I just want to touch on, one anecdote here to talk about is that in 2013, then-Vice President Biden came to Connecticut post the Sandy Hook murders, and he took aside the then chairman of Project Child Safe, and he said, referring to Project Child Safe, "You guys are doing a lot of good things, including the gun lock thing. This isn't just Joe Biden blowing smoke. I mean it." Even then, Vice President Biden recognized the importance of Project Child Safe and the value of education in the area of safe storage.

I want to touch on one other point that I think is very important to make here. That is, the messenger matters in regards to dealing with firearms issues. We understand that this proposed law, as it's written, will create and could create additional mistrust and animosity between the Federal Government and gun owners. My concern here is that gun owners might tune out or not listen to the message if it's coming from an authority, a mandate from the Federal Government.

We're concerned about that, and we know from our experience with the VA and the AFSP that the audience is more likely to respond to a message if the messenger has credibility, experience, and has earned the trust of the audience. Being that we're the trade association for the firearms industry, it's clear that we have credibility in the regard to firearms and how to safely store them and handle them. People look to us for this information, and that, I think, is a very powerful message.

We believe, as between training and education versus Federal mandates, education and training is more impactful. In fact, the General Accountability Office reported in 2017 that they—and this is a quote: "Our review of the studies relating to safe storage approaches, that is device distribution and physician consultation, found that providing a free locking device to study participants influenced behavior to store firearms more safely, and physician consultation generally did not." Okay?

They said, "Project Child Safe is the largest and longest running program of this kind in the country, distributing now more than 40 million kits with cable-style locks." The GAO recognized that there is credibility in what we're saying, and they support the approaches we're taking.

I'll leave you with one last point, and that is potential alternative approaches to a Federal mandate. As Senator Cruz indicated, Project Child Safe has been the recipient of two Federal grants over the years, one during the George W. Bush administration and one in the Obama-Biden administration. These were competitive grants which Project Child Safe was fortunate to win, and as a result, were able to spread the word of safe gun storage to millions of Americans.

Possibly, the Government should talk about creating additional grant opportunities so that we can, again, magnify the reach and scope of this project. Right now, it's supported by donations, mainly from the industry, from individuals, some companies. But to have the Federal money to be able to make this on a larger scale, I think, will make a lot of difference for this.

The other thing I would recommend is that in 2013, the NSSF supported creating a tax deduction for locking devices. This was H.R. 1883, introduced by Representative John Carter. It would have created a tax deduction for up to \$1,200 for the purchase of a locking device. I know a similar bill was introduced last year by Representative Mike Levin of California, but the numbers were very small in terms of the rebates available. We would certainly believe that there's different approaches to the same—to deal with this problem, and perhaps in a more unifying manner than a Federal mandate.

We would definitely welcome a new voice to the discussion. Thank you again for your time and attention. I appreciate it.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bartozzi appears as a submission for the record.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Mr. Bartozzi. Mr. Bonar.

**STATEMENT OF DR. TED BONAR, DIRECTOR OF
END FAMILY FIRE, BRADY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. BONAR. Thank you, and good afternoon. Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Cruz, and distinguished Members of the Committee. My name is Dr. Ted Bonar, and I'm here today to speak to the importance of safe storage of firearms. I'm a clinical psychologist from Columbus, Ohio, with a specialty in the treatment of suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, and working with service members, veterans, and their families.

I've worked directly with the military-connected community throughout my professional career. I trained at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago. I've held clinical positions as a veteran expert at three universities. I have worked as a subject-matter expert with PsychArmor, and the Center for Deployment Psychology.

I'm now the director of End Family Fire with Brady. Family fire is a shooting involving an improperly stored or misused gun found in the home, resulting in death or injury. End Family Fire is a national educational campaign that speaks directly to and with gun owners to increase the safe storage practices of firearms.

Twenty-three thousand. It's an astounding, astonishing, devastating number. That is roughly the number of people living in America who will die by suicide using firearms this year. Suicide is complex, and there is one of—there is one variable that stands above all others as a determining factor. That variable is access to a firearm, because when a firearm is used in a suicide attempt, the result is death about 90 percent of the time. Put simply, we can effectively reduce the number of suicides in the United States through strategies that increase the safe storage of firearms.

I'd like to make four important points about suicide and firearms.

First, there's a common belief that the majority of people who die by suicide take action impulsively. However, most people who attempt suicide have thought about the plan and action well ahead of time. The moment of decision comes after experiencing incredible psychological pain, and the deep desire to be free of that pain. The word impulse implies that there is nothing we can do about any of this, and this is false.

Second, firearms are the method of suicide that results in death far more than any other. Other methods of suicide attempts are much more frequent, such as the most common method of intentional drug overdose, which results in death about 2 percent of the time. No other common method of suicide comes close to resulting in death 90 percent of the time.

Third, when a person is at risk for suicide, an evidence-based strategy is to put as much time and distance between a person and the method as we possibly can. Safe storage practices, sometimes increased during the crisis, provide a temporary barrier between a person in crisis and a firearm. There are countless methods of safe storage of firearms that respect the rights of firearm owners while decreasing the likelihood that the firearm might be used in a suicide attempt.

Fourth, there is a belief that if someone wants to die, they will end their life through any method possible. So if they don't have

a firearm, they will simply reach for something else. But means for suicide are rarely substituted. The method a person chooses to attempt suicide is a personal decision. For gun owners or someone from law enforcement or a military-connected background, the lethality of guns is not an abstract concept. If a firearm is chosen, it is not easily substituted.

We must also address the problem of suicide in the context of veterans and veteran households, as veterans use firearms in suicide attempts and die by suicide at a much higher rate than civilians. They also have much higher rates of gun ownership.

I'll quickly share a few points from three friends of mine.

One, a decorated Marine combat veteran says, "I have to tell my buddy where and how I'm storing my guns. I can't always have them around, but I still own them."

A Navy combat veteran mom with two teenagers says, "I have a biometric lock. Nothing less would do."

An Army veteran mom with a 3-year-old daughter worries that her kid could find the shotgun the family stores in the back of their closet.

Safe storage of firearms is an evidence-based strategy to reduce the rates of veteran suicides as well as youth suicide and unintentional shootings that result in injury or death of children.

I've included more information on each of these in my written testimony, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have. Safety and security are common-ground values for most Americans who own guns and those who reduce—those who work to reduce the likelihood of unintentional injury or death by suicide. Safe storage of firearms in the home is a principal solution to reducing gun violence and respecting constitutional rights. Laws around safe storage have been upheld by the courts, and the research is conclusive: Safe storage saves lives.

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify here today, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Bonar appears as a submission for the record.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thank you very, very much, Dr. Bonar. I'm going to ask Senator Whitehouse to go first with his questions because he has another commitment, and then ask the Ranking Member to go ahead. I'm going to be here for the duration, so I'll hold my questions.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Thanks. I have a question for Dr. Haasz. First of all, thank you for being here all the way from Colorado.

You heard Mr. Willeford say that he was never again going to keep his firearm unloaded in a safe, that he was always going to have it loaded and available for himself from here on out. If that were the state of firearm safety in homes across America, what do you think the likely outcome of that would be in your emergency rooms?

Dr. HAASZ. I think the outcome would be devastating. Quite frankly, I'm not sure that these kids would make it to our emergency rooms. We know from modeling that even a modest increase in safe storage in homes would significantly decrease injury and mortality to youth. We also know that in States that have child access protection—prevention laws and States that have safe storage

laws, there has been a significant decrease in injury and mortality among youth.

I am sorry—the personal experience he has, I can understand. But if that was the standard, I think that would have devastating consequences for our children.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. If households kept loaded firearms out and not in safes, could you make any general guestimates as to what the effect of that would be on either gunshot wounds coming into emergency rooms or, as you say, gunshot wounds that don't come to emergency rooms because the victim is the decedent?

Dr. HAASZ. Yes. I wouldn't be able to make specific estimates as to the number, but I could say that it would be much more significant just seeing how the injuries and mortality decrease when people do store their gun safely. I think that they would increase significantly if they don't.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. That would be the necessary corollary proposition. Correct?

Dr. HAASZ. Yes.

Senator WHITEHOUSE. Yes. Thank you very much for coming here. Thank you, Chairman Blumenthal for this hearing, and good luck with your legislation.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Whitehouse. Senator Cruz.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to each of the witnesses for your testimony.

Mr. Bartozzi, your organization has distributed more than 38 million gun locks, free of charge through local law enforcement agencies and over 15,000 communities across the United States. This voluntary program, known as Project Child Safe, has been so successful that even the Obama Justice Department awarded you with a \$2.5 million grant to expand the program.

Can you explain how this voluntary program works and what the results have been?

Mr. BARTOZZI. Basically, Senator, we have a lock giveaway program. We partner with law enforcement primarily, but also faith-based groups around the country, and they take the locks, and they distribute them to their parishioners, to their people in their communities. Recently, we had the Detroit Police Department go door to door and hand out Project Child Safe locks and materials. There was, about 2 weeks ago, Albuquerque had a drive-thru Project Child Safe event where a councilwoman there handed out the free locking device.

We—you know, this is a nonjudgmental, no-questions-asked program. This is not an idea where we're going to check your credentials about gun ownership. We want people to be safe. We want people to have access to the means of safety right away, so that's why these locking devices are so important. They are immediately available to start using right then and there.

Additionally, we have a comprehensive website which offers award-winning videos. We have checklists. We have a pledge that goes out to gun owners about securely storing firearms. One other thing about Detroit, recently two Detroit Pistons basketball players did a PSA, using our pledge as the basis for the PSA, and it was outstanding. Now, myself, I'm Celtics fan, so I'd love to see other teams get involved with this. But it was really encouraging to see

members of various communities get involved and teach about safe storage.

Okay. It's not just about a lock. All right? A lock is important, but more important is education and training. We talk about what households might be more affected, but it depends on how the children are raised in that household, what type of training and education they receive on firearms and safe firearm handling. It all goes together as one—you know, it's not one thing or the other. I think you need to have both.

Again, the idea is that we make it voluntary. We have resources on social media, on multiple websites. We have availability to give away these locks. We've given away now over 40 million now. The number is up, and we're very proud of that fact.

Again, it's about options. Right? Not everyone's circumstances are the exact same. What might work in your house might not work in someone else's. We explain there's biometric, there's digital, there is RFID, there's combination locks, there's key locks. Whatever fits your lifestyle, and your economic availability as well, because some of these safes are very expensive. We want to give people the means to do this right away to be safe right away, and encourage—encourage the use of these locks, but not mandate it.

Senator CRUZ. Mr. Bartozzi, I agreed with your testimony right up and to the point when you said you were a Celtics fan. I have to say, as a Houstonian and a die-hard Rockets fan, given the miserable season we had last season, I just found that deeply hurtful, although I will readily concede Larry Bird is one of the greatest players to have ever played.

What did the data show about the effectiveness of Project Child Safe? If the objective is to expand the use of safe storage, does the program work? What do we know?

Mr. BARTOZZI. We know the program works in that, and I won't provide exact—I don't have the exact—but in the 20 years that Project—22 years that Project Child Safe has been in existence, we know that fatal accidents have decreased by 40 percent.

Okay. Now, there is a lot that goes into that. Hunter safety classes, our own First Shots program, which we teach safety to first-time gun owners, and things of that nature all come into this. We also see that fatal accidents involving firearms at the lowest record—lowest point on record. Since 1903, we now see that fatal firearm accidents are at less than 500 per year. That, again, I will concede is 500 too many. I will not make that argument. However, we are seeing progress.

We are seeing—and progress is a good thing because it shows that we can have an impact. All right? That's what we're looking for, is an opportunity to have an impact on the discussion, on the dialogue, and the ability to save lives. That's what we're very encouraged by.

Senator CRUZ. I'll note one study that researchers did find—found that the free installation of gun cabinets to 255 households resulted in the rate of homes containing unlocked guns dropping from 95 percent, in the case of this study, to 35 percent within the course of the year. If the objective is to actually have guns secured where—where they can't be misused by a child, there are proven results.

Mr. Willeford, I want to turn to you. You and I have gotten to know each other quite well since the horrific mass murder in Sutherland Springs. I spoke with you the day after that murder. I would note, Mr. Willeford was at home, minding his own business, when the shooting started. As he described, he ran and got his gun, and he ran down the street, barefoot, didn't put on his shoes. He engaged with this mass murderer.

He yelled out at him. The mass murderer fired at him repeatedly. He fired back. Mr. Willeford is an NRA rifle instructor. Even though the mass murderer was wearing body armor, Mr. Willeford struck him twice, which caused him to flee and stop murdering. In the case of this murderer, he murdered children, including infants.

Mr. Willeford then pursued the mass murderer in a truck driven by a passer-by, and directed the police to where he was, and ultimately the mass murderer passed away from the injuries sustained in that gunfire.

The heroism Mr. Willeford demonstrated that day was extraordinary. Mr. Willeford, I will never forget what you said that day, when I told you that State law enforcement and Federal law enforcement repeatedly said if you had not acted and not acted so quickly, that many, many more lives would have been lost that day. I thanked you for your incredible courage. Your response, you said you disagreed with the word courage. You said that you had never been more afraid in your entire life. At the time, I said, "Mr. Willeford, courage is not the absence of fear. It is acting in the face of fear."

Thank you for the courage you had saving those lives. But having gone through that horrific Sunday morning, do you believe if you had been able to access your firearm more readily, and I would note you are trained, you are safe, you are a grown man. If you had been able to access it more readily, do you believe that more people would be alive today?

Mr. WILLEFORD. Thank you, Senator Cruz, for asking me that question because I truly believe there were 90 seconds. We timed it both ways, and it was 90 seconds. I need people to understand that I'm not advocating that no one keep their guns locked away. I think that the circumstances—your own personal circumstances will change the situations. My circumstances are, I don't have any young children in my house, and when I do, they are away from the children and taken care of where they cannot get to them.

Again, as I stated, that if I would have been there 15 seconds earlier, Kris Workman would still be walking, and carrying his 7-year-old daughter. I don't even want to know who was shot before Kris, because in a minute and a half, that's an eternity. Who else could I have saved on that day? That will forever haunt me.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you, sir.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Senator Cruz. Thank you all, again, for being here.

Let me begin by joining the Ranking Member in thanking Mr. Willeford for the acts of heroism on that day in Sutherland Springs. Gratitude and admiration for his courage. I agree with Senator Cruz that it was courage.

But just to make the point to him that far fewer than 90 seconds would be required to use the kind of safe storage that is available now. On May 25, 2021, we have—

[Holds up cell phone.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Technology, and it's on all of our cell phones, that enable us to press in less than a second. Or, if we don't like that, in again, less than a second, to access our phones—

Senator CRUZ. Senator Blumenthal, I would note you just put out on C-SPAN the code on your iPhone, so you might want to change that now.

[Laughter.]

Chair BLUMENTHAL. I—My life is an open book. I recognize that it's happened before.

But more to the point, Mr. Willeford, I would like to continue this conversation with you because our legislation applies to people who could, and I'm quoting I believe, "reasonably expect for a child or someone else who should not have access to a firearm, to have that access." Let me just repeat. In the home of the neighbor where Ethan Song was playing, that family could and should have reasonably expected a child to have access because they had a child.

Mr. Willeford has no children. He could be understood to have no reasonable expectation that a child would have access, or another person who should be denied access, like a convicted felon.

This law is narrowly framed. It's not a blunderbuss, mass mandate overriding individual rights. Mr. Bartozzi has pointed out that there is all kind of technology now that enables quick, ready, easy, costless access to guns for self-defense, if they are needed. There's a whole debate about whether a person may do more damage and harm if untrained and unsupervised in a self-defense case. But putting aside that issue, just to allay Mr. Willeford's concerns about this law, it's narrowly framed. Technology permits access in far fewer than 90 seconds.

By the way, although many would recommend that guns not be stored loaded, there's nothing in this law that forbids a gun to be stored safely and securely, but loaded, ready to be used in the kind of circumstance that Mr. Willeford encountered.

Mr. Bartozzi, I must admit that I'm left scratching my head about the argument that, somehow, education and training are incompatible with this law. Maybe you could explain why that's so when we know from other safety—health and safety law that, in fact, education is promoted by people knowing that there is a legal requirement.

Seat belts. Buckle up. Childproof caps. Be careful. There are educational campaigns designed around these laws. I will tell you in the State of Connecticut, as you well know, the Song crusade for Ethan's Law was hugely educational. It created a massive amount of awareness about this problem. Maybe you can explain your position.

Mr. BARTOZZI. Yes. Thank you, Senator, for the question. The—I may have misspoke here. Of course, education and training is paramount to everything that we do and everything that we stand for. There's no question there.

The concern here, from my part, is that the bill creates what I would call a one-size-fits-all approach to this situation, not acknowledging that there are differences in circumstance from household to household, based on experience, education, and, in fact, training. Whether there are children in the house, for example, makes a big difference.

I would—again, I don’t want to beat this to death, but I think the penalty clauses in this bill make it somewhat difficult to comply with in that it’s vague in what is reasonable and secure storage. Once a gun is stolen and used in a crime, that becomes the sole proximate cause of the action, which the gun owner then is liable for. I think that is certainly a bridge too far for a lot of people because you—even if it’s proven that the gun was locked and reasonably secured, you have to go through facing prosecution, potential jail time, to clear your name of that, and try to prove it to a jury of your peers.

I mean, I think there are elements here that we certainly agree upon. I mean, there is no question that we support safe and secure storage. We advocate, more than anybody else on this planet, we advocate for safe storage of firearms. We do. The record shows it very clearly. The concern is creating another Federal mandate that would punish gun owners for the acts of a criminal if the gun is stolen, right? The homeowner is a victim, yet if that gun is used in crime or a suicide, God forbid, that because a sole proximate cause. I think there becomes legal liability that I’m just not particularly comfortable with.

So, yes. I agree with you that education, of course, is paramount. But I think there are elements of this law that I think just go too far to be in my comfort zone.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Okay. If you were assured that a legitimate, law-abiding gun owner would not be charged as an aider and abettor in some crime committed by someone who stole his gun, which I consider, as a prosecutor, unlikely to the point of impossible, you would back this legislation?

Mr. BARTOZZI. I can’t say that I would back the legislation. Of course, the devil is in the details. I would—I would certainly commit to taking a look at it, just like we do with of every other piece of legislation that comes up that affects the rights of gun owners and the firearm industry, which we represent.

But I would also point out that the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, in Section 5, does, in fact, require gun locks to be given out with every handgun. It is a defense if that gun was locked and is stolen and used in a crime. There are elements that cross over here that perhaps there is some consistency, compatibility.

So I will commit to reviewing any proposed changes to this, absolutely, and have my office, and my staff work with your office as appropriate to review this.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Let me say, the NSSF tells gun owners, quote, “Always make absolutely sure that firearms in your home are securely stored, out of the reach of children and other unauthorized persons.” It also advises them, “Unloaded firearms can be secured with a firearm locking device to make them inoperable—

inoperable, stored in a locked cabinet, safe, firearm vault, or storage case.” You recognize that quote, I’m sure.

Mr. BARTOZZI. Generally speaking, yes.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. I think it would be an understatement to say that we may not agree on all the details, but it sounds like in practice, and in fact, NSSF supports safe storage as a practice, but not as a requirement.

Mr. BARTOZZI. That is correct.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. That’s why NSSF opposes Ethan’s Law at a Federal level. In your written testimony, however, you wrote, and I’m quoting, “It is our belief that individual States, and not the Federal Government, are in the best position to make the determination of what is best for its citizens,” end quote.

Mr. BARTOZZI. Yes.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. That’s correct?

Mr. BARTOZZI. That is correct. And I believe that because, again, every situation is different. Some rural States, where hunting is more prominent and prevalent, they teach their children in different ways than perhaps people in more urban settings. I think the State legislatures are in a much better position to know the individual needs of their constituents than is the Federal Government.

That’s all—the point there is the States ought to have a say in this thing, rather than a Federal Government, one-size-fits-all mandate from Washington, DC. That is the—that was the reason why I put that in there.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Let me ask you, Ms. Song. Did NSSF support the Connecticut State law, Ethan’s Law?

Ms. SONG. Yes. One of the things that my husband and I did was we met with the CCDL. They were the first people that we spoke with about the law and about safe storage. I want to tell you that they sat down with us, and they were really proud about how they stored their weapons, because they did have children in their house, and they did understand how deadly these weapons were.

I also wanted to share with you one of the Republican comments that was made to me, when they voted Ethan’s Law out of Committee, by Representative Bizzarro. He shared with me that when he was young, his house was broken into, and he would never forget the fear that his family felt. And so he was going to make sure that his three daughters were protected from any intruders. But after listening to my story and hearing Ethan’s story, he decided to go out and buy a biometric safe, and he places it now on his nightstand. He told me, “We can do both. I can do both. I can protect my family, but I can also protect my children from any internal dangers.”

It hadn’t dawned on him that his children could gain access to his gun. You know, he felt like you could do both. You could protect your family at the same time as keeping the guns out of your children’s hands.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. There were Republican legislators who supported it?

Ms. SONG. Yes. There was overwhelming bipartisan support. I want to say maybe 4 days after we talked about Ethan’s Law, Vinnie Candelora, who is one of the Ranking Members in Connecti-

cut's Republican House, not only supported it, but helped us champion the law.

These were Republicans that had never voted for a gun legislation in their entire life, and I probably would bet they will not vote for another one. But they understood that this was not something that the NRA doesn't ask, that the NSSF doesn't ask for.

That safe storage is—you know, I spent the weekend going through all of the material of the NRA and the NSSF, and there was not one place that I read or watched where it said that you should leave a loaded, unsecured firearm in your home if you have children. I'm just asking them to do exactly what they so meticulously and so brilliantly explained for each gun owner.

We're not going after the responsible gun owners. We're going after the negligent gun owners, as in my case. Ethan's best friend grew up with guns. He was trained by the NRA on guns. His father took him to the shooting range. His father carried a gun for work. This was not a child who was unfamiliar with how to safely handle a firearm, and yet he went into his father's closet, pulled out the shoebox with the three guns and bullets, and introduced my son to what would be his ultimate death.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Mr. Bartozzi, does the NSSF support Ethan's Law in Connecticut?

Mr. BARTOZZI. Senator, I don't recall if we actually came out affirmatively to support it. I don't believe we opposed it. Recalling that Connecticut already had a safe storage law already on the books.

I would add just one other thing here. You know, what we're talking about from the NSSF perspective is a proactive approach to educating people. This—many of these laws would only come into effect after the tragedy has occurred. We're trying to prevent these things. Right? It's more important to prevent a tragedy than to deal with the pieces afterwards. Because who—what prosecutor is going to prosecute a family of a child who was killed by one of their guns? It would be very difficult to do so.

We're trying to get ahead of this thing. We're trying to be ahead of the curve, educate people on what we believe to be the best practice here for keeping guns safely, but also recognizing there are different circumstances from household to household and from State to State.

Again, we're looking at it from perhaps a different perspective. There's a lot of common ground here, but there are issues where we would not be comfortable.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. But NSSF never supported Ethan's Law. And it doesn't today.

Mr. BARTOZZI. I can't say that. I don't know, as I sit here today. I don't know.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. You represent that organization.

Mr. BARTOZZI. Indeed, I do.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. You speak for it today.

Mr. BARTOZZI. I support the—

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Will you support Ethan's Law today?

Mr. BARTOZZI. Are you asking if the organization affirmatively supported it when it was in legislation? I don't know. I don't know the answer. I just—I simply don't know as I sit here today.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. You don't know whether your organization supported Ethan's Law?

Mr. BARTOZZI. Supported it at the time?

Chair BLUMENTHAL. My recollection is that you didn't. In fact, that you made statements opposing it.

Senator CRUZ. I think he may be confused between your Federal bill—

Chair BLUMENTHAL. No. I'm talking about Connecticut.

Mr. BARTOZZI. In Connecticut. Okay. The law in Connecticut, we believed, went too far in some instances. Obviously, we support safe storage. That is the reason I'm here. That is the sum and substance of my testimony.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. I'm asking you about Ethan's Law in Connecticut, which you opposed. Correct? Now, you thought it went too far.

Mr. BARTOZZI. I—

Chair BLUMENTHAL. And I welcome your being willing to talk to us here, at the Federal level about the specifics as you just indicated. But I think it's important to recognize that even at the State level, despite your testimony here today, you opposed it then. Have you supported safe storage laws in any State?

Mr. BARTOZZI. We do oppose mandates for safe storage. We do support education and training. We support safe storage of firearms. Where we get concerned is the Government mandates and the penalties imposed on gun owners.

So, the answer—well, the short answer is no. But we do believe there is common ground here, which is why we advocate for safe storage in the first place.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. The common ground is the same common ground we would have on seatbelts, where we agree seatbelts are important and necessary. By the same logic, you would oppose a mandate for seatbelts. You'd oppose other public health and safety measures.

And so my understanding is that NSSF has never supported, indeed universally opposed, these kinds of laws elsewhere.

I'd like to ask Dr. Haasz, because you've experienced this problem in a way that, I think, is difficult for us to comprehend. You've seen the ghastly, gruesome results that the paramedics wouldn't even show Kristin Song.

Could you tell us whether you think that these kinds of laws can be preventative of these kinds of tragedies? Mr. Bartozzi has indicated again, somehow they're—they're incompatible, or they would diminish the effects of preventative action.

Dr. HAASZ. My concern—

Chair BLUMENTHAL. If you could turn on your microphone again.

Dr. HAASZ. Sorry. I could share my experiences both as an ER physician, which I have spoken about some, and also as a researcher because there is data to support—to support safe storage laws.

Education, I agree, is critically important when it comes to safe storage. Much of my research is focused on providing this education, in the emergency department, to kids who are at risk for suicide, to families who own firearms who have toddlers in the

house. However, I don't think education is enough. Education has to be coupled with mandates.

Our kids, who are getting hurt, who are getting injured, don't get to vote. It's our responsibility to keep them safe.

We know that multiple States have child access prevention laws that go to different extremes, and we know that the stronger child access prevention laws have improved—have seen steeper declines in their rates of injury and death for children. I actually do think that creating a policy is preventive. Creating laws isn't so that we can punish people. Creating laws is so that we could educate people about these laws, and they follow them.

Creating laws about car seats wasn't so that we could punish people who don't put their kids in car seats. It's so that universally, now, people put their children in car seats, and children are not dying in car accidents. I think this safe storage law is very similar and provides the impetus for people to follow the laws, provides the impetus for us to educate families about safe storage, and really increase safe storage, and take care of our kids.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. Let me ask Dr. Bonar. Do you agree that requiring safe storage would be preventative both in education and in encouraging people to adopt the kinds of new technology that is available?

Dr. BONAR. Yes. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal. I do believe that public education and public health efforts that lead toward behavior change are what we need to move forward to prevent unintentional injury and the loss of life. I think that the examples that we just heard, whether it's car seats, or seat belts, and we have many others that we can talk about, are examples of this. I think that those are efforts that honor constitutional rights, as well as serve as broad public education that results in behavior change that saves lives.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Thank you. I just have a few more questions, but I appreciate all of your patience, and the Ranking Members as well.

Kristin, the Ranking Member mentioned legislation that would provide for tax deductions and grants. Is that enough?

Ms. SONG. No. But we don't oppose that. In fact, when we chatted with the CCDL, they said, "Hey listen, we want an educational program a part of Ethan's Law," and we said, "Absolutely, 100 percent."

Anything that will—anything that will create a cultural shift so that people naturally, instinctively, lock up their guns when children are around, you know, we don't—you know, we—in Connecticut, I will say that one of the things that I thought was so amazing was that we really put our partisan parties aside, we put our egos aside, and we spoke to each other as parents. And so, as parents, you know, we all agreed that our children's life, our children's safety was paramount.

You cannot even begin to imagine the pain of losing a child. It is—destroys your world. It destroys who you are. It destroys your family. It destroys your community. My son, who is a senior at BC, asked me the other day as we were sitting on the couch, "Do you think you'll ever be the old you? We miss the old you." The answer

is no, you know? You're broken. You are forever broken. There's just no way to fix it.

We are all for anything that brings this cultural shift to this country, so that people can own guns, defend their families, but, at the same time, keep children in their home or children who are visiting safe.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. I will just say, from my experience, that your remarkable attitude really brought people together on both sides of the aisle. It made this issue of safe storage distinctive and separate from other issues relating to gun violence, which is the reason why it had such overwhelming support.

I agree with you also that tax deductions for people who purchase safe storage means and mechanisms, I would support it—

Ms. SONG. Our—

Chair BLUMENTHAL [continuing]. As part of a safe storage law.

Ms. SONG. Our foundation actually hands out, free of charge, biometric safes. We are absolutely, 100 percent for if you want your gun, go for it. But you need to be responsible.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Grants for education programs?

Ms. SONG. Absolutely. You know, we've already started creating a curriculum in Connecticut. We're really excited because I think Connecticut is going to lead the way in educational curriculum for gun safety.

Again, you know, we're not opposed to that. We totally agree that education could absolutely impact some children. But at the same time, there are some children, like Ethan, like his best friend, who was very educated on gun safety. Teenage boys, teenagers, they are stupid. They engage in risky behavior. As a parent, if you don't understand that, then you're kind of fooling yourself.

I have not found one person yet who hasn't engaged in some risky behavior during their life, even though they've been told by their parents or have been educated that it was not safe or appropriate.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Again, extending the analogy to the seat belts, or the air bags, or other car safety features, the fact that we require seat belts, or air bags in cars doesn't mean we're taking away your cars.

Ms. SONG. Absolutely not.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. Or your license to drive them.

Ms. SONG. Absolutely not. Truly, I mean this from the bottom of my heart, we do not want to take anyone's guns away. We would really just want to create a cultural shift like we did with Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

When I was in college, I was stopped at a sobriety checkpoint in upstate New York. I was not driving, but I remember, because I was shocked, the police officer leaned in and said, "Who's the most sober in this car?" You know, my friend raised her hand, and they switched. She wasn't the most sober in the car. That was the attitude back then, and it wasn't until we had this—you know, until we realized how many people and how many children we were losing to drunk driving did we make that cultural shift.

My children—you know, when I say to them, "Don't drink and drive." They look at me like I'm crazy. That's really how Mike and I envisioned this law. It's that people would—you know, in 20 years

there would be just this incredible cultural shift, with the technology, so you could easily access your guns, so you could protect your family, but at the same time protect your children internally, in your home.

Chair BLUMENTHAL. In fact, many State laws authorize judges to require that there be steering wheel locks with breathalyzer tests for people who have violated laws against drunk driving, so that they can't even operate the motor vehicle——

Ms. SONG. Correct.

Chair BLUMENTHAL [continuing]. If they have had a drink. Let me just finish by saying to Mr. Bartozzi, I'll make a deal with you. And it's really an offer to my Republican colleagues. I'll support, and I do support, the tax deduction and the grants in H.R. 8631 and H.R. 1883 if you will support Ethan's Law.

Mr. BARTOZZI. Should I respond to that?

Chair BLUMENTHAL. I'm not going to ask you to say no now because I hope maybe we can—or yes. Because I hope you'll think about it. It is a very serious offer, and it's not meant to put you on the spot. It's not really meant to you personally. It's really meant to people who are thinking about this issue in good faith, and who want to save lives.

You have testified in effect taking some credit for reducing gun deaths by your distribution of safe storage mechanisms. It is a matter of life and death. If we can reach a bipartisan consensus here—and I think it's within reach because it makes such commonsense—I think we can do a lot of good for a lot of people.

Eight children every day unintentionally kill or injure people as a result of an unsecured firearm in a home. Even after all you've done, 40 percent of all the households that have guns do not practice safe storage. I think we can do better. I think the gun owners of America, more than 60 percent, believe in safe storage. The vast majority of the American people believe in safe storage. Republicans, by I think it's 70 or 80 percent, believe in safe storage.

I'm hoping that we can do better. This hearing has provided an important step in that direction.

Senator Cruz, if you have any—I really want to thank you all for being here today. You have been excellent to Mr. Willeford and Mr. Bonar. Thank you. Thank you to each of the witnesses who is here in person. You've been extraordinary, and we thank you.

This record will remain open for 1 week in case anyone wants to submit written questions. This hearing is closed. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:30 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Additional material submitted for the record follows.]

A P P E N D I X

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**Testimony of Dr. Maya Haasz
Pediatric Emergency Physician at Children's Hospital Colorado
Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, University of Colorado School of Medicine**

**U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution
Stop Gun Violence: Safe Storage
May 25, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Blumenthal, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify here today.

My name is Dr. Maya Haasz, and I am here today representing Children's Hospital Colorado and the Colorado Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am here to speak in favor of bills that would improve the safety of our children.

I have been a Pediatric Emergency Medicine physician for 10 years. In that time, I have seen many firearm injuries, including in children as young as two years old, which could have been prevented by safe firearm storage requirements. The lucky ones survive, with any number of visible scars to go along with the emotional and psychological trauma they and their families carry forward. Those who do not survive leave behind a world of grief. The cry of a parent whose toddler has died is agonizing. When a child has been fatally shot playing with their sibling or in any number of preventable situations, the added layers of guilt and "what ifs" add a new, almost tangible, layer of pain for all involved.

Firearms are the second leading cause of death in children, ahead of cancers and heart disease.¹ Thirty-five percent of these firearm deaths are suicides and four percent are due to unintentional injuries. More than 17 children in the US are injured by a firearm every day² and more than 32 die every week, on average.³ In my home state of Colorado, a child is injured by a firearm every 1.3 days and one child dies every week,

¹ Cunningham RM, Walton MA, Carter PM. The Major Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States. N Engl J Med. 2018 Dec 20;379(25):2468-2475.

² Based on three most recent years of complete data (2013, 2014, and 2016). Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project, last accessed June 25, 2020, hcupnet.ahrq.gov.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS), "Fatal Injury Reports," last accessed Apr. 1, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars>. Calculations include children ages 0–17 and were based on the most recently available data: 2014 to 2018.

on average.⁴ Something has to be done to protect our kids from the dangers of unsecured firearms.

I thought about this a few months ago when a 14 year-old was brought to the Emergency Department after a suicide attempt by drug overdose. Minutes after his attempt he felt a moment of remorse and told his parents what had happened. They called an ambulance, we treated him, and he survived.

This same story happens multiple times a week. After receiving medical and emotional care, these patients get another chance at life and the vast majority will not go on to die by suicide.

Firearms, however, are uniquely lethal. I walked back to my desk after taking care of that 14-year-old boy knowing that he probably would not have been alive for us to treat had he used a gun instead of medications. Most who attempt suicide by firearm do not have the chance to change their mind, and most should never have had access to a firearm in the first place. Over 90% will die.⁵ For adolescents, over 80% of these deaths will occur with a gun found in the home⁶ and most of these guns belong to a parent.⁷

These are the realities I see play out in my line of work every day, and over the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated my job as a pediatric emergency physician. I've had to adapt to new protocols and adjust who can visit the sick children on our floors. I learn ever-changing processes, keeping pace with new evidence. And I've had to assuage my patients' anxiety while managing my own worries.

However, COVID also showed us what's possible when research and public awareness are combined to save lives. As this crisis progressed, public health professionals developed new protocols such as masking and social distancing, medical health professionals got better at treating coronavirus patients, and communities stepped up to

⁴ Carl Armon, PhD, Jessica Cataldi, MD, Edwin Asturias, MD, Cameron Todd, James Todd, MD, "Fatal and Nonfatal Firearm Injuries Compared to Automobile Injuries in Colorado Children," <https://www.childrenscolorado.org/496703/globalassets/healthcare-professionals/firearm-and-auto-injury-1999-2019.pdf>

⁵ Andrew Conner, BS, Deborah Azrael, PhD, Matthew Miller, MD, MPH, ScD. "Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014." *Annals of Internal Medicine*. (December 2019) <https://doi.org/10.7326/M19-1324>.

⁶ Simon, Thomas R., Alan C. Swann, Kenneth E. Powell, Lloyd B. Potter, Marcie-jo Kresnow, and Patrick W. O'Carroll. "Characteristics of Impulsive Suicide Attempts and Attempters." *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior* 32, no. s1 (2002): 49–59. <https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.32.1.5.49.24212>.

⁷ Johnson, Renee M., Catherine Barber, Deborah Azrael, David E. Clark, and David Hemenway. "Who Are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides?" *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior* 40, no. 6 (December 2010): 609–11. <https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.2010.40.6.609>.

stop the spread. Now, there's a little less fear and uncertainty, and while we're not out of the woods yet, we're far ahead of where we were.

This needs to happen with gun violence, too.

The idea that we can solve problems in this manner isn't new—in fact we've seen it play out before in other industries. For example, when a greater emphasis was put on researching the effectiveness of things like seat belts, child safety seats, improved safety standards for cars, better roads, driver licensing programs, and teen drinking and driving awareness campaigns, new requirements were created based on the data and the rate of deaths from motor vehicle crashes among children and adolescents decreased by 38% between 2007 and 2016.⁸

In contrast, the rate of firearm-related mortality among children and adolescents has remained stable over the same period, and in 2020, our hospital treated more than double the number of firearm injuries as in 2019. What's the difference here? When it comes to firearm-related deaths, there is a distinct lack of data-supported public health interventions supported by state, local, and federal governments, particularly around safe storage.

This is not just a public health issue, this is a public health emergency, and it is our duty to act. We need to act as we did to address deaths from motor vehicle collisions and COVID-19, when we looked at the data we collected, and made evidence-based decisions that would improve the health of our population. In doing so, we didn't need to resort to drastic measures like taking away cars, and instead, we researched ways to make cars and roads safer. The same can be done with firearms if we take similar steps.

This year has seen record numbers of firearm sales⁹ and 4.6 million minors in the US currently live in homes with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm.¹⁰ Individuals experiencing crises with access to firearms are in serious danger, as are women and children vulnerable to domestic abuse. For them, home can't be a refuge until we act.

⁸ Rebecca M. Cunningham, M.D., Maureen A. Walton, M.P.H., Ph.D., and Patrick M. Carter, M.D. The Major Causes of Death in Children and Adolescents in the United States, *N Engl J Med* 2018; 379:2468-2475, (December 2018) <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMsr1804754>.

⁹ Based on Giffords Law Center calculations of adjusted NICS data. "NICS Firearm Background Checks: Month/Year," Federal Bureau of Investigation, last accessed April 1, 2021, https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics_firearm_checks_-_month_year.pdf/view.

¹⁰ Deborah Azrael, Joanna Cohen, Carmel Salhi, and Matthew Miller, "Firearm Storage in Gun-owning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey," *Journal of Urban Health* 95, no. 3 (2018): 295–304.

While federal law does make it unlawful for any licensed firearms importer, manufacturer or dealer to sell or transfer any handgun unless the transferee is provided with a “secure gun storage or safety device,” it does not require gun owners to properly store their firearms when children are present. Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have some form of law to do so. Numerous studies over the past 20 years have found that laws like these can reduce suicide and unintentional gun deaths and injuries among children and teens by up to 54%.¹¹

Because of my background, I testified in March before the Colorado State Legislature in support of such a law. That bill was thankfully enacted. I urge the members of this Subcommittee to consider and act upon similar legislation at the national level, including Chairman Blumenthal’s bill, S.190, *Ethan’s Law*. This bill would set a national standard for the storage of firearms in residences where children live and would encourage states to enact similar standards by offering federal funding to help law enforcement and the courts enforce and facilitate compliance with these standards. I also support Senator Blumenthal’s *Safe Gun Storage Act*, which would establish consumer product safety standards for firearm locks and firearm safes.

I come here as a researcher, a mother, and a Pediatric Emergency Room physician. But mostly, I am here as an advocate for child safety.

I am here for the playful 5-year-old boy who was paralyzed from the waist down by a stray bullet that struck him when he was playing outside a year prior, who now has to come to the emergency room whenever he has a fever.

I am here for the toddler who arrived at our hospital after being shot while playing with her sibling. For her family, who will agonize over her death and whether they could have prevented it.

I am here for the many other youth who, in their moment of crisis, found a gun to use in their suicide attempt instead of a bottle of pills. These kids, unfortunately, never make it to the hospital. I wish I could share their names, their faces, more of their stories so you can understand that these could be your neighbors, your grandchildren, your children.

¹¹ Emma C. Hamilton, et al., “Variability of Child Access Prevention Laws and Pediatric Firearm Injuries,” *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 84, no. 4 (2018): 613–619. See also, Peter Cummings, David C. Grossman, Frederick P. Rivara, and Thomas D. Koepsell, “State Gun Safe Storage Laws and Child Mortality Due to Firearms,” *JAMA* 278, no. 13 (1997): 1084–1086; Daniel W. Webster, Jon S. Vernick, April M. Zeoli, and Jennifer A. Manganello, “Association Between Youth-focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides,” *JAMA* 292, no. 5 (2004): 594–601; Jeffrey DeSimone, Sara Markowitz, and Jing Xu, “Child Access Prevention Laws and Nonfatal Gun Injuries,” *Southern Economic Journal* 80, no. 1 (2013): 5–25.

I know that the vast majority of gun owners keep their firearms safely away from children and adolescents; however, too many do not. Keeping children safe should not be a choice. I implore you to pass legislation that will help ensure that their firearms are properly locked so that children do not have access to them. No more broken families, no more needless injuries and deaths.

Thank you.


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Joseph H. Bartozzi

President & CEO

May 25, 2021

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Cruz, and other members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about the importance of safe storage of firearms. My name is Joseph Bartozzi and I am the President and CEO of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the trade association for the firearm and ammunition industry.

NSSF has been the leader in safe storage advocacy efforts since launching Project ChildSafe® in 1999. Project ChildSafe has, for more than two decades, administered a program that provides firearm safety education, training and the means to securely store firearms when not in use. In fact, *no organization has done more in the area of safe firearms storage than has Project ChildSafe.*

The success of Project ChildSafe is a testament to the dedication the firearm industry has to real firearm safety, and one of the reasons our manufacturers have voluntarily included a locking device in every box sold since the late 1980's. We believe that the messenger matters and members of the industry and our Project ChildSafe partners in law enforcement throughout the United States have credibility in encouraging gun owners to store their firearms safely. And it has worked. The Government Accountability Office reported in 2017 that a program that discusses safe storage and gives people the means to store their firearm safely is the most effective way of changing behavior. We are concerned that if safe firearm storage becomes politicized, it will dissuade some from considering the many safe storage options that are available to secure their firearms when not in use.

Because of this, we are concerned that government efforts to dictate behavior will be counterproductive. NSSF *opposes* S.190, *not* because we are opposed to the secure storage of firearms when not in use, but rather because we feel that education and training on the topic of firearm safety and safe storage is more effective than government mandates.

More specifically, NSSF believes that this Bill: could further politicize the issue of firearm ownership, leading to reduced interest in secure storage; would create a virtually unenforceable law; could create the potential inability of armed self-defense; would subject citizens to untenable strict liability jeopardy; and would create a "one size fits all" approach to firearm safety.

As a means of further explanation, and as an alternative to S.190, we submit the following:

NSSF's Project ChildSafe

Project ChildSafe ("PCS") is a program of the National Shooting Sports Foundation and was created in 1999 to promote firearm safety and education. PCS is the largest and most comprehensive firearm safety education program in the country. It is our mission to prevent unauthorized access to firearms. In doing so we are creating safer communities by preventing accidents, thefts, misuse, and suicides.

PCS and the industry that supports it are committed to promoting real solutions for genuine firearms safety through the distribution of free safety education messages, firearm safety kits, and gun locks. Since its inception, PCS has worked with more than 15,500 Law Enforcement and community partners, and collectively we have delivered *40 million* safety kits and gunlocks to communities in all 50 states and all U.S. Territories.

This figure does not include the countless millions of Americans who have gone to Project ChildSafe events, or to our websites (including, but not limited to projectchildsafe.org) or our social media platforms to avail themselves of our free Resource Library. We have developed, and continue to develop an extensive collection of literature, award-winning videos and interactive materials for parents, teachers, and children to educate on the importance of safe and secure firearm storage.

Project ChildSafe provides real, tangible solutions by educating gun owners on the wide variety safe storage options that currently exist and that are in wide usage. These options include all level of price points: cable-style locks, gun cases, lock boxes and full-size gun safes.

Options for firearm storage include key or combination lock access, Radio Frequency Identification ("RFID") fobs and biometric (fingerprint) access. By offering options, PCS is taking care not to discriminate against any socio-economic condition, but rather chooses to educate on the various options in order to let the gun-owner decide which method best fits his or her unique situation.

As an outgrowth of PCS, NSSF works extensively with suicide prevention organizations, including the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

In addition to the PCS program, the firearm industry has been voluntarily including locks and safety materials in every box with a firearm for decades. Well more than *120 million* locks and safety material has been distributed in PCS kits and in boxes with firearms at retail.

It is our position that we do not need Congress to mandate something that we have been doing voluntarily for decades. We also believe strongly that the best way to get people to secure firearms safely is to work with them, not talk at them.

The Messenger Matters

The NSSF has long believed that gun owners will respond more favorably to messages that are delivered by trusted sources. There is a wariness of government or NGO groups that deliver messages purporting to be about "gun safety," as often this is code for "gun control." As a project of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, gun owners can be certain that we have the knowledge, experience, credibility, and firearm bona fides that they can trust.

In fact, the Government Accountability Office reported in 2017 that: "Our review of the studies relating to safe storage approaches (device distribution and physician consultation) found that providing a free locking device to study participants influenced behavior to store firearms more safely and physician consultation generally did not." NSSF's Project ChildSafe is the largest and longest running program of this kind in the country, distributing now over 40 million kits with cable style locks. Additionally, this approach has been validated by our work with the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA). Based upon recent work with VA, it has been reported to us that when a firearm retailer was presented with VA materials on veteran suicide prevention, there was a reluctance to fully engage on this difficult topic. However, when the same VA representative returned weeks later with NSSF suicide prevention materials, the trust of our message created an environment where our literature is now freely available to their customers, and a relationship has been forged between the retailer and the VA representative that will save lives.

It is our position that talking to gun owners, *as gun owners*, will carry more significance and be more likely to change storage behaviors than adding another federal law, and including severe penalties which can only be imposed *after* a tragedy has occurred.

The favorable downward trend in accidental fatalities involving firearms.

Although our mission has been and continues to be the elimination of accidental firearm fatalities through education and training, in the 20+ years since the inception of PCS, fatal accidents involving firearms have declined by more than 40%.

According to the latest report from the National Safety Council, accidental deaths involving firearms have declined to all-time lows. Since records have been kept on this subject, starting in 1903, fatal accidents have been steadily declining - through education and training – not through legislation.

For instance, in 1903, 2,500 “preventable-injury-related deaths” related to firearm accidents were recorded. The highest number of unintentional firearm-related deaths occurred in both 1929 and 1930 – recorded at 3,200 deaths for each year.

Contrast this with 2019 (the latest figures available) and for “all ages” there was a total of 486 unintentional firearm-related deaths. Accidental deaths from firearms account for 0.3% of all unintentional fatalities.

While we at NSSF and members of our industry are not satisfied with any accidental deaths involving firearms, we are gratified to see progress without the need for federal government mandates.

Self-Defense

Our research has shown that millions of first-time firearm owners decided to purchase a firearm for self-defense and/or home security. As such, we must suppose that these gun buyers want to have the option to defend themselves and their family with a firearm while at home. There is concern amongst many gun-owners that overly stringent and potentially vague restrictions such as are found in S.190 would render them defenseless or in a “no-win” situation, from a legal perspective. This is why PCS stresses options based upon the unique needs of every individual or situation, rather than a broad, vague federal mandate.

The majority in the *Heller* case determined that the District of Columbia’s mandatory law requiring guns to be inoperable and therefore unavailable for self-defense violated the Second Amendment.

“The requirement that any lawful firearm in the home be disassembled or bound by a trigger lock makes it impossible for citizens to use arms for the core lawful purpose of self-defense and is hence unconstitutional.”

In order to avoid protracted litigation and uncertainty of choosing between self-defense and a violation of this statute, we submit that education and training is a better course of action.

State Approaches

The issue of the storage of firearms when not in use has traditionally been a state law/policy issue. A few states, including Connecticut, already have Child Access Prevention Statutes (CAPS). The level of knowledge and understanding about the use of firearms, especially in the context of hunting, or in more rural populations, varies widely from state to state.

As such, it is our belief that individual states - and not the federal government - are in the best position to make the determination of what is best for their citizens.

Liability Provisions

We are very concerned about adding yet another opportunity to criminalize gun owners under federal law.

If a firearm is stolen from a residence and later used in a crime, the proximate cause element in S.190 will necessarily result in the burden of proof shifting to the victim of the burglary / larceny. He or she will need to prove that they complied with the provisions of the Bill – but only after they face prosecution, fines, and imprisonment. This Bill creates an untenable situation for the victim of a burglary / larceny, and would, in reality, create strict liability for that victim.

Further to this point: How is the owner of the firearm going to “prove” that they stored their firearm “in a location which a reasonable person would believe to be secure”? Alternatively, how is a “secure gun storage device or safety device” defined? For example, whether a firearm is secured by a cable lock designed for firearms, a lock box, or a full-sized gun safe, and that locked and secured firearm is stolen, taken to another location and the lock / box / safe is attacked with some manner of tool. Eventually, the lock will be removed or the box / safe will be opened. If a secured firearm is stolen, it is certainly possible that it may be used in a crime. Under this scenario, how would this statute apply to the homeowner? In order to be cleared of the proximate cause element, they would need to defend themselves against prosecution in accordance with these vague and ambiguous elements.

An Alternate Approach

NSSF has supported legislation creating a tax deduction for locking devices going back to 2013. In the 113th Congress, Rep. John Carter introduced, H.R. 1883, The Secure Firearms Act which would have created a tax deduction of up to \$1200 for the purchase of a locking device – a much larger incentive than what was included in H.R. 4926 which was introduced last congress by Rep. Mike Levin (D-CA).

Another piece of legislation introduced last congress was H.R. 8631, the Responsible Ownership of Firearms Act, by Rep. Jared Golden, (D-MA). This bill would authorize a competitive grant program at the Department of Justice for the procurement and distribution of firearm locking devices and educational materials on firearm safety.

NSSF believes that this approach would be a more unifying and less divisive approach to this matter. As such, we would support and welcome new voices to this discussion.

The Subcommittee should also be aware that we have also run into many hurdles when trying to spread the word about firearm safety and encouraging the safe storage of firearms. On two separate occasions, NSSF was denied the opportunity to advertise for Project ChildSafe and for our "Real Solutions for Safer Communities" campaign. One was by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority specifically at Reagan National, and the other was by the Washington Metro Area Transit Authority in metro stations around the DC area. If Senators on this committee wanted to be helpful in the effort to spread the word, you could encourage management at these two organizations to allow ad space to be purchased to encourage the safe storage of firearms.

Conclusion

Although NSSF is an outspoken advocate for the safe, responsible, and secure storage of firearms when not in use, for the foregoing reasons, it does not support S.190 and urges this Committee to consider the arguments made herein.

Respectfully submitted,



Joseph H. Bartozzi
President & CEO of NSSF and SAAMI
Chairman of the Project ChildSafe Foundation

Testimony of Kristin Song
United States Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution
Stop Gun Violence: Safe Storage
May 25, 2021

Good Afternoon Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you so much for inviting me to speak.

I once knew a woman whose eyes sparkled. Her posture was relaxed, her movements deliberate and full of energy. The pleasures in her life were her family and her greatest joys were her children. Her heart was full of gratitude.

Her children grew into teenagers, and she fell more in love with them. Even when she received phone calls, “Mom, I am okay, but the car is totaled.” “Mom, don’t freak out, but I broke my nose in three places.” Or when the school called to inquire if her third child was planning on handing in any homework-ever. She understood these were trials and rites of passage. They were surmountable and good learning lessons for her children.

I saw that woman on January 31, 2018. She and her son had a fun and relaxing morning together. He got his braces off and was so happy. She took a picture of him with his new smile and sent it off to her husband. At breakfast, her beautiful boy told her about his hopes and dreams. He wanted to go to Rice University, join the Army, marry and have seven children.

They returned home, and her beautiful boy walked to his best friend’s house. Later, the woman saw two police officers walking across her lawn. Her heart sank. She heard the ambulance scream by her street, carrying her beautiful boy.

She ran towards the hospital bay where her beautiful boy lay, but she was stopped and guided to a tiny room. The ER doctor slid down the wall, put his head in his hands, and whispered, your beautiful boy was gone. She crawled into a fetal position, she wanted to disappear. Her husband called their daughter and son; she will never forget the raw, guttural sobs that escaped from their mouths.

She begs to see him; she needs to tell him again he is loved and cherished, to kiss his forehead, to tuck him in one last time. The doctor chokes out he is unrecognizable, even to her eyes.

While her family walks out of the hospital, her beautiful boy is being wheeled to the morgue.

The woman and her family sit in silence on the car ride home. There was nothing to say; you can’t fix death.

I saw that woman on February 1, 2018. Her eyes are dull, her posture slumped, her movements as if by rote. She is in a stupor. Her smile has turned to tears; her energy is gone; the pain is so intense she can barely breathe. She doesn’t sleep, and when she does, he visits her, calling to her. She frantically tries to reach him, but he slips through her fingers and slowly fades away. She would have traded places with him in an instant. She sits with her coffee in the kitchen and contemplates suicide –*no more pain*. Her other son grabs her hand and says, “I

would not survive if I lost another member of this family.” How did he know? Was it that obvious? She now knows she has no other choice but to live.

My name is Kristin Song, and I am that woman. The beautiful boy was my 15-year-old son, Ethan.

He was shot in the head in his best friend’s house with an unsecured gun. He had zero chance of survival. The father, the gun owner, stored his three guns and bullets in a shoebox.

What would you do never to be asked these questions by a funeral director, “Do you want to bury or cremate your child? Or, “Do you want a lock of their hair?” You see, that was all he could offer me from my precious child.

To avoid having to answer those questions, would you use a biometric safe that opens in just a few seconds?

I wanted to thank all of the gun owners who secure their weapons. Ethan would have been safe in your houses; he would have walked out of your homes and into my arms.

While I applaud all of the organizations that emphasize that it is the gun owner’s personal responsibility to secure their guns, that is not enough. If it were, I wouldn’t be here today. I would be at home—with my son. We need laws—like *Ethan’s Law*—to mandate safe storage and save lives.

The gun owner could have saved Ethan in the time it takes to draw one breath, simply by locking up his guns. If he had, my beautiful boy, with his infectious smile, would be walking across the stage to accept his high school diploma next month. Instead, that night, while his friends are throwing their caps into the air, I will be sitting at Ethan’s grave—and the only one speaking his name will be me.

My name is Stephen Willeford. Normally when I give a speech, or make a statement, it is about the importance of preparedness. After a shooting incident, it is customary for Police Officers to review what went right, and what went wrong. Today, I am here to tell you about what went wrong, and the consequences of those decisions. This is the hardest statement I will ever make.

I have led an unordinary, and yet incredibly blessed life. I live in a small town, about an hour outside of San Antonio, where my wife and I raised three kids. I grew up in the area. I know my neighbors. The town is safe, quaint, and comfortable.

I have been a gun owner all my life. I trained my kids how to handle firearms from a very young age. I am comfortable around firearms, and have extensive knowledge of them. I own a safe, and because I thought it was the responsible thing to do, I kept my rifles and handguns locked away. Because nothing bad happens in my town.

Until the day it did.

On November 5th, 2017, an evil and deranged man opened fire into the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, where 49 of my friends, community members, and neighbors were gathered to worship. This madman brought a vehicle full of firearms and ammunition that he obtained because the government failed to enforce its own pre-existing laws.

When shots tore through what should have been a peaceful Sunday morning, my daughter ran down the hall, and alerted me in my room. At first I didn't believe her, but upon further investigation, I recognized what I was hearing, and flew into action. I want everyone listening to take a moment to imagine themselves in this situation. Imagine yourself running down the hallway to your house, and fumbling with the lock on your safe. Imagine hearing each shot ringing through the air, knowing the damage that is being done. Knowing that one of your

community members is on the receiving end of that bullet. Knowing that you are not fast enough. I grabbed my AR-15, grabbed a handful of ammunition- eight bullets, I would later find out is all I could hold in my palm. I ran to my front door, loading the gun as I ran. My daughter met me in the living room.

In the time it took me to open my safe, and grab ammunition, my daughter had jumped in her car, driven up the block, witnessed the murderer in full tactical gear entering the church, and returned. How much time had that taken? I timed it. About 2 minutes.

I could have saved 90 seconds if my firearm had been loaded, and not locked behind a giant steel door. I timed that too. These moments were precious, and completely lost. 90 seconds does not sound like a lot. But to me, it will always be the longest seconds of my life, and my greatest regret.

The police officers in my town are some of the best. Our deputies, and officers did everything they could to respond to the active shooter in Sutherland Springs. But, as author Chris Bird wrote "When seconds count, police are only minutes away". In our community, it was nineteen. It took nineteen minutes for the police to make it across the county to our town, after the first 911 call. Every second of that time counted. I was my community's first responder.

When my daughter came back from the church, and told me what she saw, I was in the living room, headed for the door. I didn't even pause to put on shoes. Each step I took, each yard I gained was too slow, and was time lost, as the gunfire continued. I screamed out as I drew closer, and the shooter heard me. My voice made him stop killing my neighbors, and face me.

Seconds before he heard me, he shot Kris Workman in the spine, paralyzing him from the waist down. If I had had my firearm ready, would this young husband and father still be able to walk today? I have never asked who was shot before Kris. I cannot bear to know.

To be brief, the massacre ended when the killer and I traded shots, and he fled. I pursued him down the highway, where he took his own life.

49 people went to church that morning. 26 didn't make it out alive, and not one person walked out of that church uninjured.

Firearms did not commit this atrocity. Don't get this story wrong. Evil did this. My firearm helped stop it in its tracks. But how much faster would I have been able to respond if I had my gun ready?

In contrast to my story, let me tell you about April Evans. April is a young mother from Virginia, married to a police officer. One night, when her husband was at work and April was home alone with their two year old daughter, a criminal began busting her door down. April had her gun. She called out to warn him, but he didn't stop as he burst into her house, and ran down the hall. April fired, brought him down in the hallway, and held him at gunpoint until the police arrived.

In these precious seconds, imagine if April had to fumble with a safe. Imagine if politicians had passed a law mandating what April was allowed to do in her own home. Would she have had time to open the safe, aim, and fire? Would she have had time to protect her daughter, and herself?

There are a lot of things that we can learn from April's story, and my own. First, is the importance of the Second Amendment, and our God given right to protect ourselves. Second, is the importance of preparedness. No one thinks that something like this can happen in their communities. But it can.

I will always be haunted by those 90 seconds wasted getting my gun from the safe and loading it.

I will never again keep my firearm unloaded in a safe. I will never again leave my family members, and my community vulnerable to the predations of criminals and madmen. Whether or not this law passes, I will not comply. I won't make that mistake again. It came at too high a cost.

It was a hard way to learn this lesson. An unjust way to learn this lesson. But a lesson learned nonetheless. The answer to our problems is not more restrictions. It's more education. It's an informed public. It's educating kids on gun safety from an early age.

Government stepping into an individual's home and dictating how they can act in each individual circumstance, legislating how they are allowed to defend themselves and keep their families safe- will not end well. We as individuals are responsible for the decisions we make in our own home. We have that right- not given to us by our government, but by our creator. Our government is there to protect and support that right, not legislate it. Each of you made that promise when you were sworn into **our office**. I urge you to back up that promise with your vote.

Since that day, I have spoken at a lot of different events on the importance of preparedness. People come up to me, and shake my hand, and thank me for doing what I did. I don't think it was anything special. I think a lot of people in my situation would have responded the same.

But they always ask me how many lives I think I saved that day. My answer is always the same: not nearly enough.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.



Dr. Ted C. Bonar, Psy.D., Director of End Family Fire at Brady
Before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution
May 25, 2021

Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Cruz, and Distinguished Members of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution,

Founded in 1974, Brady works across Congress, courts, and communities, uniting gun owners and non-gun owners alike, to take action, not sides, and end America's gun violence epidemic. Our organization today carries the name of Jim Brady, who was shot and severely injured in the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan. Jim and his wife, Sarah, led the fight to pass federal legislation requiring background checks for gun sales. Brady continues to uphold Jim and Sarah's legacy by uniting Americans from coast to coast, red and blue, young and old, liberal and conservative, to combat the epidemic of gun violence.

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony before this Subcommittee today on the importance of safe storage and suicide prevention. I've worked directly with the military-connected community throughout my professional career. I completed my training at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago. I have held clinical positions at three universities where I worked with veterans on campus. I have worked directly with service members, veterans, and their families as a Subject Matter Expert with PsychArmor, and the Center for Deployment Psychology. I have spoken at over 200 university and civilian training events where I provided advanced training to mental health professionals seeking to better serve the military-connected community.

I have worked as a professional mental health provider and advocate with and for service members, veterans, and their friends and families since 2005. As a civilian without military experience, I am committed to narrowing the military-civilian divide, and I have been honored and humbled to work closely with many in the military-connected community.

I am currently the Director of End Family Fire with Brady. Recognizing that the safe storage of firearms in the home could save countless lives per day, Brady launched End Family Fire in 2018, a campaign in partnership with the Ad Council, that speaks directly to gun owners about the safe storage of firearms. Family fire is a shooting involving an improperly stored or misused gun found in the home, resulting in death or injury. Unintentional shootings, suicides, and intentional shootings are all forms of family fire.

Suicide represents over 60 percent of all gun deaths. In 2019, there were a total of 41,935 suicides in the United States, and 21,709 — over 51 percent — were firearm suicides. Firearm suicides have accounted for about half of all suicide deaths for many years, with the number of firearm suicides reaching roughly 24,000 per year prior to 2019. Over the last five years, an average of 64 Americans have died by firearm suicide each day.¹ An average of eight children and teens (between the ages of one and 17) sustain unintentional gunshot wounds today, tomorrow, and every single day due to family fire.² Among children, the majority unintentional shooting deaths occur in the home.³

This written testimony will examine suicide, including service member and veteran, as well as youth suicide, unintentional shootings, the safe storage of firearms, and public education strategies shown to be effective in the prevention of injury or death by firearm.

Suicide and Firearms:

While the public health problem of suicide is multifactorial, there is one variable that stands above all others as a determinant to a death by suicide in the United States — the use of a firearm. When firearms are used in a suicide attempt, the result is death about 90 percent of the time.⁴ Simply stated, we can effectively reduce the number of suicides in the United States through strategies that expand and strengthen the practice of safe storage of firearms.

There are four important points about suicide and firearms critical to understand:

First: There is a common belief that the majority of people who die by suicide take action impulsively. Most people who attempt suicide have thought about the plan and action well-ahead of time. Their moment of decision comes after experiencing intense psychological pain and the deep desire to be free of that pain. However, most suicide attempts occur within less than an hour of the decision to make an attempt,⁵ and

¹ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-Based Injury Statistics Query & Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports, National, Regional and States, 1999 to 2019.

² “Key Statistics.” Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence. Accessed May 21, 2021. <https://www.bradyunited.org/key-statistics>.

³ Li, Guohua. “Factors Associated With the Intent of Firearm-Related Injuries in Pediatric Trauma Patients.” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 150, no. 11 (1996): 1160. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.1996.02170360050008>.

⁴ Conner, Andrew, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller. “Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014.” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 12 (2019): 885. <https://doi.org/10.7326/m19-1324>.

⁵ Deisenhammer, Eberhard A., Chy-Meng Ing, Robert Strauss, Georg Kemmler, Hartmann Hinterhuber, and Elisabeth M. Weiss. “The Duration of the Suicidal Process: How Much Time Is Left for Intervention Between Consideration and Accomplishment of a Suicide Attempt?” *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 70, no. 1 (2008): 19–24. <https://doi.org/10.4088/jcp.07m03904>.

25 percent of individuals who attempt suicide make an attempt within five minutes of deciding to end their lives.⁶ While the decision to act can be made quickly, decision differs from impulse. To suggest that suicide is impulsive is to suggest that there is nothing we can do to plan, intervene, or prevent a suicide attempt. This is false.

Second: Firearms are the method of suicide that results in death far more often than any other lethal means. The use of a gun in a suicide attempt results in death 90 percent of the time, compared to less than two percent of intentional drug poisoning attempts, which is, by far, the most common attempt method.⁷ Simply and bluntly, when used during a suicide attempt, guns are effective in almost every case.

Epidemiological studies directly link access to firearms to higher suicide rates. States with the highest rates of household firearm ownership have higher rates of suicide overall than states with the lowest household firearm ownership rates, even though rates of non-firearm suicide are comparable across these states.⁸ A recent study identified handgun acquisitions and deaths in a cohort of 26.3 million residents of California over the age of 21 and found that the rate of suicide among male handgun owners was three times higher than non-owners and the rate of suicide among female handgun owners was seven times as high as non-owners.⁹ The elevated rates of suicide among these handgun owners was driven by much higher rates of gun suicide, not of higher rates of suicide by other methods. Research in this area indicates that “gun ownership and unsafe gun storage likely do not initiate risk, but may amplify existing risk.”¹⁰

Third: When a person is at risk for suicide, we want to create as much time and distance between them and the method as possible. While moments of crisis are extremely dangerous, they are often temporary. If a firearm is safely stored, it is less likely to be used during a moment of urgent — but temporary — distress. The availability and effectiveness of firearms greatly increases the risk of a fatal outcome, should someone attempt suicide.¹¹ The majority of those who survive a suicide attempt — 70 percent — do not make another attempt to end their life.¹² Putting barriers in place between a person thinking of suicide and their preferred method of suicide can delay or prevent a suicide attempt altogether. Storing firearms locked

⁶ Simon, Thomas R., Alan C. Swann, Kenneth E. Powell, Lloyd B. Potter, Marcie-Jo Kresnow, and Patrick W. Ocarroll. “Characteristics of Impulsive Suicide Attempts and Attempters.” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 32 (2002): 49–59. <https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.32.1.5.49.24212>.

⁷ Conner, Andrew, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller. “Suicide Case-Fatality Rates in the United States, 2007 to 2014.” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 171, no. 12 (2019): 885. <https://doi.org/10.7326/m19-1324>.

⁸ Miller, Matthew, Steven J. Lippmann, Deborah Azrael, and David Hemenway. “Household Firearm Ownership and Rates of Suicide Across the 50 United States.” *The Journal of Trauma: Injury, Infection, and Critical Care* 62, no. 4 (2007): 1029–35. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.ta.0000198214.24056.40>.

⁹ Studdert, David M., Yifan Zhang, Sonja A. Swanson, Lea Prince, Jonathan A. Rodden, Erin E. Holsinger, Matthew J. Spittal, Garen J. Wintemute, and Matthew Miller. “Handgun Ownership and Suicide in California.” *New England Journal of Medicine* 382, no. 23 (2020): 2220–29. <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmsa1916744>.

¹⁰ Anestis, Michael D., and Daniel W. Capron. “Deadly Experience: The Association Between Firing a Gun and Various Aspects of Suicide Risk.” *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 48, no. 6 (2018): 700. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sltb.12381>

¹¹ Drexler, Madeline. “Guns and Suicide: The Hidden Toll.” *Harvard Public Health*, https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/guns-suicide/.

¹² “Attempters’ Long Term Survival.” Means Matter. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, January 9, 2013. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/survival/>.

and unloaded, with ammunition stored separately, can thus be an effective measure to reduce the risk of suicide.¹³

There are countless methods of safe storage of firearms that respect the rights of firearm owners and decrease the likelihood that a firearm might be used in a suicide attempt.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly: There is a belief that if someone wants to die, they will end their life through any method possible. This is the idea of “means substitution,” which implies that methods of suicide are interchangeable. The scientific and lived-experience research clearly demonstrates that means for suicide are rarely substituted by those considering a suicide attempt. The method a person chooses to attempt suicide generally has purpose and reason for the individual. For example, for those with experience in the military or law enforcement, or the many owners of firearms in this country, the lethality of guns is not an abstract concept. For a person from one of these groups to choose a firearm as a method for suicide is an informed decision. If a firearm is chosen, it is not easily substituted.

Service Members and Veterans Unique Risk of Suicide:

Some communities are uniquely at risk of increased suicide attempts and death by suicide. The military-connected community, including all service members and veterans, is one such group. While only about 7 percent of the U.S. adult population,¹⁴ veterans account for 18 percent of the nation’s gun suicide deaths.¹⁵ Female veterans have an even higher rate – more than twice that of their civilian counterparts, and nearly half of all women veterans who died by suicide use a firearm, compared to just over a quarter of civilian women.¹⁶ Service members and veterans are more likely than their civilian counterparts to have access to firearms, and they possess the knowledge and training in how to use them. Nearly half of all veterans own at least one firearm,¹⁷ while about one-third of U.S. adults own a firearm.¹⁸

¹³ Shenassa ED, Rogers ML, Spalding KL, Roberts MB. “Safer Storage of Firearms At Home and Risk of Suicide: A Study of Protective Factors in a Nationally Representative Sample,” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 2004; 58(10):841-848.

¹⁴ “Those Who Served: America’s Veterans From World War II to the War on Terror.” United States Census Bureau, May 26, 2020. <https://www.census.gov/content/census/en/library/publications/2020/demo/acs-43.html>.

¹⁵ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-Based Injury Statistics Query & Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports, National, Regional and States, 1999 to 2019; “VA Releases 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report.” [www.va.gov](https://www.va.gov/OPA/PRESSREL/pressrelease.cfm?id=5565). U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, November 12, 2020. <https://www.va.gov/OPA/PRESSREL/pressrelease.cfm?id=5565>.

¹⁶ “Suicide Among Women Veterans: Facts, Prevention Strategies, and Resources April 2019.” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, April 2019. https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/docs/Women_Veterans_Fact_Sheet_508.pdf.

¹⁷ Cleveland, Emily C., Deborah Azrael, Joseph A. Simonetti, and Matthew Miller. “Firearm Ownership among American Veterans: Findings from the 2015 National Firearm Survey.” *Injury Epidemiology* 4, no. 1 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-017-0130-y>.

¹⁸ Saad, Lydia. “What Percentage of Americans Own Guns?” Gallup, April 3, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/264932/percentage-americans-own-guns.aspx>.

Firearms are used in 68 percent of veteran suicides compared to 48 percent of non-veteran suicides.¹⁹ Among military service members, firearms were used in 60 percent of suicides among the Active Component, 66 percent of suicides among the Reserve, and 79 percent among the National Guard.²⁰ A 2019 study of active-duty military personnel revealed that military personnel with recent thoughts about death or self-harm were much less likely to store their firearms locked and unloaded than non-suicidal service members.²¹

Military-connected individuals have a unique relationship with weapons. Firearm training is foundational within the experience and culture of our armed forces. Safety is considered a value in these training sessions, as mission security and task completion are non-negotiable. The lethality of weapons is not an abstract concept for this community. Individuals from this culture may have relied upon weapons for survival while serving. If they did not personally experience firearms as tools for survival (e.g. from personal experience in combat), they certainly know people who have, and are each aware that they might have been called for this responsibility. Military experience and firearms cannot be separated.

Transition from military to civilian life, therefore, does not always include the separation of veterans from weapons. Many veterans see firearms as more than a lethal tool that is needed for protection, safety, and survival; firearms can be an aspect of a person's identity. Within some communities, firearm ownership is expected. And, indeed, the Oath of Enlistment begins with a sworn oath to "...support, and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies..."²² Owning a firearm following service may therefore be understood as a direct extension of this oath by veterans.

A military-connected individual's experience, values, and identity is entirely consistent with the understanding that, when used, firearms are lethal weapons. When used during a suicide attempt, they are effective. Service-members and veterans use firearms during suicide attempts more often than non military-connected people. The rates of suicide by firearm among all military-connected people are higher than in non-military individuals. Increased safe storage practices for military-connected individuals is consistent with safety, security, identity, and the Constitutional rights for which these individuals served our country.

¹⁹ "VA Releases 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report." [www.va.gov](https://www.va.gov/OPA/PRESSREL/pressrelease.cfm?id=5565). U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, November 12, 2020. <https://www.va.gov/OPA/PRESSREL/pressrelease.cfm?id=5565>.

²⁰ "Department of Defense Releases Second Annual Suicide Report." U.S. Department of Defense, October 1, 2020. <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2367917/departments-of-defense-releases-second-annual-suicide-report/>.

²¹ Bryan, Craig J., Annabelle O. Bryan, Michael D. Anestis, Lauren R. Khazem, Julia A. Harris, Alexis M. May, and Cynthia Thomsen. "Firearm Availability and Storage Practices Among Military Personnel Who Have Thought About Suicide." *JAMA Network Open* 2, no. 8 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.9160>.

²² U.S. Army Center of Military History. "Oaths of Enlistment and Oath of Office." U.S. Army Center of Military History, Accessed May 24, 2021. <https://history.army.mil/html/faq/oaths.html>.

Suicide Risk Among Youth:

Over the past decade, the rate of firearm suicide among children under the age of 18 has been increasing.²³ Results from recent research on Americans between the ages of 10 and 24 show that after 2008, instances of non-fatal self-inflicted injuries among this group increased almost 6 percent per year.²⁴ In 2019, 1,646 children died by suicide, and firearms were the method used in about 40 percent of those reported deaths. Almost 4.6 million minors, or, about 7 percent of all U.S. children, live in homes with at least one firearm that is stored both loaded and unlocked.²⁵ In one state-level analysis controlling for the prevalence of youth suicide attempts, researchers found that the youth suicide rate increased by 26.9 percent for each 10 percentage-point increase in household gun ownership.²⁶

A study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2018 found that within a sample of parents who owned guns, only one-third stored all household firearms locked and unloaded,²⁷ indicating that two-thirds of parents who own guns could increase the time and distance between a youth thinking of suicide and a suicide attempt by firearm through enhancing their safe storage practices.

Most firearm owners indicate that safety and protection of family is a primary reason for gun ownership. The knowledge of firearms and the lethality of weapons is considered the reason that guns are the preferred method of family protection. While the purpose of owning a firearm is oftentimes for protection, gun owners generally attribute the risk of suicide in the home as a low-probability event, even though at the population level it is, on average, more likely to occur than self-defensive gun use. A University of Washington study in King County, Washington, found that between the years of 2011-2018, for every case of killing in self-defense involving a firearm kept in the home there were 37 suicides involving firearms.²⁸ While suicide is indeed a low-probability event from an epidemiological standpoint, it is a higher-probability event for firearm owners than non-firearm owners, simply due to the effectiveness of firearms when used in a suicide attempt. Increased safe storage practices that align with the values of safety and security of gun owners are consistent with the purpose for which a firearm is valued, and remain consistent with Constitutional rights.

²³ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-Based Injury Statistics Query & Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports, National, Regional and States, 1999 to 2019.

²⁴ Mercado, Melissa C., Kristin Holland, Ruth W. Leemis, Deborah M. Stone, and Jing Wang. "Trends in Emergency Department Visits for Nonfatal Self-Inflicted Injuries Among Youth Aged 10 to 24 Years in the United States, 2001-2015." *JAMA* 318, no. 19 (2017): 1931. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2017.13317>.

²⁵ Deborah Azrael, et al, "Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownng Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey," *Journal of Urban Health* 95 (2018), available at www.doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0261-7.

²⁶ Knopov, A., Sherman, R. J., Raifman, J. R., Larson, E., & Siegel, M. B. (2019). Household gun ownership and youth suicide rates at the state level, 2005–2015. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 56(3), 335-342.

²⁷ John Scott, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, "Firearm Storage in Homes With Children With Self-Harm Risk Factors," *American Academy of Pediatrics* (February 2018), <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2018/02/19/peds.2017-2600.info>.

²⁸ Butler, E. K., Boveng, H. M., Harnuff, R. C., Duchin, J. S., Vavilala, M. S., Rivara, F. P., & Rowhani-Rahbar, A. (2020). Risk of Suicide, Homicide, and Unintentional Firearm Deaths in the Home. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 180(6), 909. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2020.0806>

Unintentional Shootings:

Many people believe that teaching children about gun safety is sufficient to prevent them from handling firearms. Data indicates, however, that safety training alone is an insufficient intervention to prevent unintentional shootings. A systematic review of the data on school and community-based gun safety programs for children between the ages of 3 and 18 showed that firearm education programs are not always effective in preventing kids from handling firearms in an unsupervised situation.²⁹ Researchers caution that while firearm safety education has value, people should not rely solely on teaching these skills and should not assume that children will avoid handling firearms simply because they have been warned not to.³⁰

Survey data published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that in homes where a gun was stored unlocked, 45 percent of children reported that they could access a loaded firearm in less than five minutes.³¹ This number was significantly lower in homes where all guns were stored locked, in which only 24 percent of children reported they were able to access a loaded firearm within five minutes. This research also revealed that 33 percent of gun-owning parents who thought their child could not access a household firearm had a child who reported they could.³² Other research from a family practice clinic in rural Alabama found that over 70 percent of children who lived in homes with guns knew the storage location of the household firearm and that 1 in 5 parents who reported that their child had never handled the gun were contradicted by their child's report.³³

Unintentional shootings that involve minors are preventable. Safe storage of firearms, where all firearms are stored locked, unloaded, with ammunition stored separately, is a primary strategy to reduce unintentional injury or death of a child.³⁴ These are strategies directly in line with the values of gun owners who place protection of family above all other reasons to own firearms, and also inherently respect all individual's Constitutional rights.

²⁹ Holly, Cheryl, Sallie Porter, Mary Kamienski, and Aubrianne Lim. "School-Based and Community-Based Gun Safety Educational Strategies for Injury Prevention." *Health Promotion Practice* 20, no. 1 (2018): 38–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839918774571>.

³⁰ "Gun Safety Programs Do Not Prevent Children from Handling Firearms." *ScienceDaily*, May 15, 2018. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/05/180515113601.htm>.

³¹ Salhi, Carmel, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller. "Parent and Adolescent Reports of Adolescent Access to Household Firearms in the United States." *JAMA Network Open* 4, no. 3 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.0989>.

³² Salhi, Carmel, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller. "Parent and Adolescent Reports of Adolescent Access to Household Firearms in the United States." *JAMA Network Open* 4, no. 3 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.0989>.

³³ Baxley, Frances, and Matthew Miller. "Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms." *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 160, no. 5 (2006): 542. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.160.5.542>.

³⁴ Grossman, David C. "Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Firearm Injuries." *JAMA* 293, no. 6 (2005): 707. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.293.6.707>.

Safe Firearm Storage: An Effective Preventative Measure:

Safe firearm storage is not only an effective mechanism to prevent unintentional injury or death, but it is also consistent with all Constitutional rights.

About 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. personally owns a firearm,³⁵ and 63 percent say that personal safety or protection is a reason for their gun ownership.³⁶ Many safety options are available to firearm owners that allow for quick access to the firearm, when necessary, that concurrently reduce the risk of injury or death. Further, safe operation of firearms is a fundamental value and skill; the entirety of the National Rifle Association's "Handgun 101 - Safe Handling of Firearms" course describes safe operation and storage of guns in detail. Safe storage of firearms is consistent with the culture, value, practice, skill, and Constitutional rights of all gun owners. Consistency with culture and Constitutional rights is evident by the geographic diversity of Child Access Prevention laws, a form of safe storage legislation that seeks to prevent unsupervised access to firearms by minors, enacted in 29 states that include Utah, Texas, and Iowa.³⁷

Increasing the accessibility of safe storage devices can help to improve firearm storage practices. An evaluation of a community-based giveaway of gun storage devices indicated that the intervention improved safe firearm storage practices among those who participated.³⁸ In follow up assessment surveys with participants, a significantly greater proportion reported that they were storing their firearms locked and/or unloaded compared to the baseline assessment.³⁹ It is estimated that if just 20 percent of households storing at least one gun unlocked changed their storage practices to locking up all their firearms, we could reduce firearm suicide and unintentional firearm fatalities among youth by up to 32 percent.⁴⁰ Interventions and strategies that include safe storage devices can help to improve the storage practices of gun owners, thereby reducing the risk of unintentional injury or death by firearm. Congress could also take measures to incentivize safe storage through other means, for instance the Prevent Family Fire Act, which was introduced last Congress, would create tax incentives to promote the sale of safe storage devices.

³⁵ Gallup, "Guns." Gallup, Accessed May 21, 2021. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1645/guns.aspx>.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Rand, "The Effects of Child-Access Prevention Laws." Rand, Accessed May 24, 2021. <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/child-access-prevention.html>

³⁸ Simonetti, Joseph A, Ali Rowhani-Rahbar, Cassie King, Elizabeth Bennett, and Frederick P Rivara. "Evaluation of a Community-Based Safe Firearm and Ammunition Storage Intervention." *Injury Prevention* 24, no. 3 (2017): 218–23. <https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2016-042292>.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Michael C. Monuteaux et al., "Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage with Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Deaths Among U.S. Youths," *JAMAPediatrics* 173 no. 657 (2019)

Conclusion:

It is critically important that we talk about these issues. Safe storage has a measurable impact on reducing the rate of suicide, including veteran suicide and youth suicide, and in preventing unintentional shootings that result in the injury or death of children. Laws around safe storage have been upheld by the courts nationwide and the research is conclusive: safe storage saves lives.

Respectfully submitted,

Ted C. Bonar, PsyD



MAJOR CITIES CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

April 26, 2021

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Virginia Beach
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Montreal, Quebec
Ottawa, Ontario
Peel Region, Ontario
Toronto, Ontario
Vancouver, B.C.
Winnipeg, Manitoba
York Region, Ontario

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal,

I'm writing on behalf of the Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) to register our support for S. 190, *Ethan's Law*. The MCCA is a professional organization of police executives representing the largest cities in the United States and Canada.

Gun safety is an equally important, albeit often overlooked, component of our country's current gun policy debate. As first responders, local law enforcement has seen firsthand the dangers that can arise when gun safety is not taken seriously. Sadly, far too many of these calls for service involve minors. For example, in 2021 alone, there have been at least 76 unintentional shootings by children in the United States, resulting in 31 deaths and 48 injuries.¹

Ethan's Law is a commonsense proposal that will save lives. The safe storage requirements established by this legislation will raise the baseline for gun safety in the United States, help prevent future tragedies, and keep our children safe.

The MCCA looks forward to working with you to advance this vital piece of legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact me at Art.Acevedo@miami-police.org if the MCCA can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Chief Art Acevedo
Chief, Miami Police Department
President, Major Cities Chiefs Association

¹ "#NotAnAccident Index," *Everytown for Gun Safety*, accessed on April 26, 2021.
<<https://everytownresearch.org/maps/notanaccident/>>



Firearm Safe Storage Practices: Implementing Evidence-based methods for Suicide Reduction

In the United States, suicide is the 10th highest cause of death and suicide rates rose in 49 states between 1999 and 2016 with 60% of firearm fatalities attributed to suicide (CDC, 2019); (Stone, Simon, Fowler, et al., 2018). Firearms are the most common means to suicide and 90% of individuals contemplating suicide by firearm will not choose another lethal means if a firearm is unavailable (Anestis, 2016); (CDC, 2019). Approximately 70% of suicides are carried out less than an hour from when the individual decides to attempt suicide (Simon, Swann, Powell, et al., 2001). Consequently, interventions such as safe firearms storage options and educating gun owners about unsafe storage practices are vital to preventing suicide.

- Safe storage is defined as locking up the firearm, storing it unloaded and away from ammunition (McCourt, 2021). These practices have been shown to decrease suicide rates and unintentional firearm fatalities in the states where that have enacted laws encouraging safe storage practices (Kivisto & Phalen, 2018); (Anestis, Houtsma, Daruwala, & Butterworth, 2019).
- Research has shown that easy access to firearms can result in higher suicide rates in those suffering from suicidal thoughts (Anestis & Houtsma, 2018); (Anglemyer, Horvath, & Rutherford, 2014).
- Studies suggest that 25% of firearm owners unsafely store their guns unlocked in their home (Crifasi et al., 2016). Moreover, individuals who are experiencing suicidal ideation are at a higher likelihood to store firearms unlocked and loaded (Anestis et al., 2020). In comparison to those who die by suicide from other means, those who die by a firearm suicide are more likely to have had access to a firearm that was unlocked and loaded (Shenassa et al., 2004).
- A substantial number of completed suicides are shown to have been made impulsively rather than planned (Simon et al., 2001); (Wojnar et al., 2009).
- Both suicide rates and unintentional firearm related fatalities are lower in samples that store their firearms locked and unloaded (Monuteaux, Azrael & Miller, 2019). Studies have shown that the use of cable locks and lethal means counseling show improvements in firearm storage (Anestis et al., 2020).

60%
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25%
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*Both suicide rates and
unintentional firearm
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Recommendations

- APA recommends federal funding for public awareness campaigns that collaborate with firearm owning communities to promote and educate about safe firearm storage practices as well as the risks of suicide and unintentional injuries from unsecured firearms.
- The federal government should allocate funding and tax credits to provide locks and safes to gun owners.
- APA recommends federal funding to train medical and mental health providers as well as caregivers on safe storage practices and how to discuss the topic with gun owners.
- Gun violence prevention research should receive increased and robust funding at the NIH and CDC to increase our nation's understanding of this public health crisis as well as develop evidence-based interventions to prevent firearms-related injuries and death.

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Testimony of Nicole Hockley, Managing Director and Co-Founder, Sandy Hook Promise

Stop Gun Violence: Safe Storage
Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution

May 25, 2021

I would like to begin by thanking Chairman Blumenthal, Ranking Member Cruz, and the members of the Subcommittee on the Constitution for holding this important hearing today. As a proud resident of Connecticut, I especially want to express how grateful we are to have Chairman Blumenthal representing our state and for his tireless work to prevent gun violence and keep our children safe.

My name is Nicole Hockley, and I am one of the founders and Managing Directors of Sandy Hook Promise. On December 14, 2012, my beautiful butterfly Dylan was killed in his first-grade classroom at Sandy Hook Elementary School, alongside 19 other first-graders and six adults.

In the wake of that shooting, I worked with other family members whose loved ones were killed that day to found Sandy Hook Promise, an organization committed to protecting children from gun violence, whether they are at school, at home, or in their community.

We know that safe storage of firearms is key to keeping children safe from accidental and intentional harm in all these places.

In 2015, an estimated 4.6 million children in the United States lived in a home in which at least one firearm was stored both loaded and unlocked.¹ Research has shown that 3 out of 4 children know the location of their parent's gun in the home and, of these kids, 1 in 3 admitted to handling the gun unsupervised.² We also know that more than two thirds of school shooters acquired the firearm(s) used in their attacks from either their own home or that of a relative.³

Additionally, over 75% of firearms used in youth suicide attempts and unintentional firearm injuries came from the residence of the victim, a relative, or a friend.⁴ Given how the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating already rising rates of mental health issues among young people in the United States and how many of us are spending more and more time in the home, it is more important than ever that firearms are stored safely and securely.

¹ *Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey.*
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5993703/>

² *Parental misperceptions about children and firearms.* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16651499/>

³ *The Final Report And Findings Of The Safe School Initiative: Implications For The Prevention Of School Attacks In The United States.* Authored by the US Secret Service and the US Department of Education.

<https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/preventingattacksreport.pdf>

⁴ *Self-inflicted and Unintentional Firearm Injuries Among Children and Adolescents.* Journal of the American Medical Association, Pediatrics.
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/347593>



To protect our children, federal and state laws are needed to ensure best practices around the safe storage of firearms. In 2018, Sandy Hook Promise was proud to stand with the Song Family in support of Ethan's Law in Connecticut, which closes an important loophole in our state's safe storage law. Today, we are proud to support the federal version of Ethan's Law, which would create federal requirements for safe gun storage.

We are also proud to support Chairman Blumenthal's Safe Gun Storage Act, which would require the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to establish safety standards for both firearm locks and firearm sales. It is commonsense that the agency tasked with checking all other consumer products for safety – from teddy bears to lawnmowers – would also ensure that products designed to keep kids safe from unsecured firearms are sound.

At Sandy Hook Promise, we know that violence is preventable. The American Academy of Pediatrics estimates that hundreds of child and adolescent deaths by firearm could be prevented each year with safe storage practices.⁵ By passing legislation to create and set requirements for commonsense safe storage laws, Congress can help save lives.

⁵ *Safe gun storage prevents child and teen deaths.* American Academy of Pediatrics.
<https://www.aappublications.org/news/2019/05/13/gunstorage051319>