



Senate Committee on Finance

Article V- Public Safety and Criminal Justice

2/08/17

Good morning. My name is Andrea Brauer, and I am the Executive Director of Texas Gun Sense, a gun violence prevention organization. We are a statewide nonprofit and nonpartisan organization advocating for common sense, evidence-based policies to reduce gun injuries and deaths. We are not an anti-gun group, and we respect the Second Amendment. We also believe that more can be done to keep high-risk individuals and children from accessing firearms and reduce crime, and the number of lives lost to gun violence. Our goal is to bring people together to find common ground on this issue. We have a diverse group of supporters that includes gun owners, gun violence survivors, law enforcement, firearms safety trainers, and even a gun shop owner. Our proposals will not infringe on law abiding and competent citizens' right to bear arms, but they will help improve the public safety for all Texans, including law enforcement.

I am here today to ask that our state budget address the public safety issue of gun violence, including deaths and injuries caused by suicides, accidental shootings, and homicides. We are asking the committee for a small fund set-aside from the license to carry fees or elsewhere, for a safe storage public awareness campaign to be implemented by the Department of Public Safety (DPS).

We recognize that the Lt. Governor supports the fee being eliminated and Sen. Nichols has filed a bill to do this. We respect the process, but ask the committee to consider that firearms deaths have increased every year in Texas since 2011, and there is no strategy to address the problem.

The Department of State Health Services reports that there were \$232 million in hospital charges for firearm injuries in 2014 alone. Allocating funds to a statewide campaign would be a sound investment in preventing death and injury and avoiding the tangible costs to our state associated with those losses.

With nearly 600 Texas children killed or injured by firearms every year and guns in 40 percent of Texas households, gun safety should be a key component of our state's injury prevention strategy. While the State is working to prevent accidents in many areas -- like use of booster seats, safe sleep, and water safety -- it is not taking similar steps to keep children safe from access to firearms, despite the fact that an estimated 199,670 Texas children live in homes with loaded, unlocked guns. Promotion of safe storage would be a practical way to address gun safety without infringing on the rights of individual gun owners.

There are also 1,900 suicides by firearms annually in Texas, and public health experts agree that many of these could also be prevented with increased awareness and safe storage promotion. Improper storage can also aid criminals. In 2012, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives reported the number of firearms stolen or lost in Texas reached 18,874. Crime, accidents, and suicides are all costly to our state and can be reduced through targeted investments and public education about the risks that accompany unlocked guns.

In March 2016, the Department of State Health Services Child Fatality Review Team acknowledged firearm accidents as a public health problem and recommended to the Governor and Legislature the creation of a public awareness campaign on safe storage. We wholly support this recommendation, and it's why we're here today.

Funding a gun safety campaign would benefit gun owners and non-gun owners alike and would require a relatively modest investment. The Department of Public Safety is requesting approximately \$8.5 million for safety education for the biennium to address motor vehicle accidents, which is above and beyond the millions that TxDOT spends annually on the same. While motor vehicle accidents accounted for 3,900 deaths in 2015, there were 3,200 deaths attributed to firearms that same year. However, there is no strategy in the DPS budget or funding to address gun safety, though we think it falls squarely within the role of DPS as their vision is to "proactively protect the citizens of Texas."

Given the great potential benefit and the state's established role in injury prevention, we respectfully request your support of funding for a public awareness campaign on safe gun storage.

Sincerely,



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