



## **HB 631**

### **House Homeland Security and Public Safety**

**4/4/17**

Good afternoon. My name is Andrea Brauer, Executive Director of Texas Gun Sense (TGS), and I am testifying in support of HB 631.

TGS is 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 support this bill because we have a gun violence problem in Texas, and current efforts to combat it are falling short. As you can see from the chart, the number of gun deaths in Texas has gone up every year since 2011. There were 443 children and teen deaths or injuries from firearms in 2013, and 567 in 2014. It has become the number two cause of accidental death in Harris County for children.

As you can see from the handout, we had 3,900 deaths from traffic accidents in 2015, and spend \$64 million a year on public education in an attempt to reduce that number. We had 3,200 gun deaths in 2015, but spend nothing to try and prevent these deaths. 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.

Our own State Child Fatality Review Team (SCFRT) made the recommendation for a safe storage campaign one year ago, and no action has been taken. This State Committee was formed in 1995 and is housed at the Dept. of State Health Services. It is a multidisciplinary group comprised of members throughout Texas. Its mission is to reduce the number of preventable child deaths. The section below is a recommendation from its March 2016 report.

#### **"6. Promote a statewide Safe Storage Campaign for gun safety.**

The SCFRT supports the promotion of a statewide Safe Gun Storage Campaign for gun safety. Examples of campaigns messages address keeping gun unloaded and locked and storage of ammunition separately. Research

shows that safe gun storage reduces unintentional injury and suicide risk. A recent systematic review of firearms storage campaigns found that communities which offered free devices had improved safe gun storage practices versus communities which offered economic incentives to obtain safe firearm storage.

Parent education is another important aspect of a gun safety campaign. The SCFRT also encourages and supports medical providers' role in gun safety and accident prevention. Medical providers should assess patients' access to firearms and educate on the importance of safe gun storage.”

The Committee made this recommendation to address problems like depressed teens finding parents' unlocked guns and killing themselves, the three year old that shot himself in Ft. Worth after finding a gun in a car outside of a Chuck-E-Cheese recently. The 15 year old Travis County boy who was also shot recently because he was playing around with the loaded gun. Or the 15 year old boy from Spring, Texas, who died from a gunshot wound from playing Russian Roulette with an unsecured firearm.

The chart attached to this testimony also indicates that there were 1,994 suicides by firearms in Texas in 2015, and a disproportionate number of these deaths were veterans. This number has risen every year since 2011, and Texas' suicide by firearm rate is higher than the national average. We just saw two tragedies in Houston in the past two weeks. A Houston police officer took his life inside a station. Most people that die by suicide do so impulsively, and 90 percent don't go on to make a second attempt. Public health experts agree that many of these could also be prevented with increased awareness and safe storage promotion.

In addition to the number of deaths, 18,000 guns are stolen or lost every year in Texas because they are not safely secured - when this happens, criminals have guns, so we have many reasons to invest in safe storage in Texas. Firearm thefts contribute to our significant gun trafficking problem in Texas.

There are other costs to gun violence. 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.

Most responsible gun owners believe in gun safety and education. I hope you will support this bill and help the Department of Public Safety with its vision to proactively protect the citizens of Texas. We can do more to promote safety without infringing on gun owners rights.

Sincerely,

Andrea Brauer

Executive Director, Texas Gun Sense

(512) 565-4480

andrea@txgunsense.org