



## Promoting Gun Safety Statewide

### *The Need*

An estimated 199,670 Texas children live in homes with loaded, unlocked firearms, which far too often leads to devastating consequences. 443 Texas children are killed or injured by firearms every year. The pervasiveness of this problem has led to guns being the second leading cause of accidental death for children in Harris County. While the State is working to prevent accidents in many areas like texting and driving, use of booster seats, safe sleep, and water safety, it is not taking similar steps to keep kids safe from access to firearms, which are estimated to be in 40 percent of Texas households.

While Texas has fairly strong criminal penalties for gun owner negligence leading to a child accessing a gun, such policies come into play only after our state has endured yet another terrible gun-related death or injury. In March 2016, the Department of State Health Services Child Fatality Review Team acknowledged firearm accidents as a public health problem and made a recommendation to the Governor and Legislature for a proactive solution through creation of a public awareness campaign on safe storage.

In addition to the hundreds of children's lives lost to inadequate storage of firearms, **1,700 Texans die by suicide using a firearm annually**; public health experts agree that many of these could also be prevented with increased awareness, and safe storage promotion.

*"Health epidemics don't end unless we intervene, taking the best science about what does and does not work and using it. It happened with Ebola, it worked for automobile crashes, and it can absolutely reduce gun violence." — Dr. Georges Benjamin, Executive Director, American Public Health Association*

The issue of safe storage goes beyond accidents and suicides. When guns are improperly stored they are at risk of being stolen. **Texas leads the nation in the number of lost and stolen gun reports. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives reported the number of firearms stolen or lost in Texas reached 18,874 in 2012.** Messaging and distribution about the dangers of leaving unsecured firearms in automobiles and the home could improve public safety and reduce crime statewide.

**Finally, gun injuries and deaths cost the state money.** The Department of State Health Services reports that there were \$232 million in hospital charges for firearm injuries in 2014 alone.

### *Recommendations*

**Pass HB 111, Rep. Moody, which creates a public awareness campaign on safe storage at the Department of Public Safety (DPS).** A portion of the \$140 License to Carry fee can be used to develop a statewide public education campaign on safe storage. The bill also gives License to Carry applicants a reduction in their application fee if they submit proof of having already purchased a secure firearm storage device.

**Pass HB 631, Rep. Howard, relating to a public awareness campaign on firearms safety and suicide prevention.** A campaign could help educate the public on the risks of unsecured firearms and gun safety.

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*Texas Gun Sense is a statewide nonprofit and nonpartisan organization advocating for common sense, evidence-based policies to reduce gun injuries and deaths.*

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