



Suicide Prevention and Access to Firearms

Pass SB 1778, Sen. Garcia, HB 631, Rep. Howard, and HB 3340, Rep. Thompson

The Need

Firearms are the most lethal and most common method of suicide in the U.S. More people who die by suicide use a gun than all other methods combined. Suicide attempts with a firearm are almost always fatal, while those with other methods are less likely to kill. Nine out of ten people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide later.

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for people aged 15-34 in Texas, and the number has risen every year since 2011. On average, one person dies by suicide every three hours in the state.
- Most gun deaths that occur in Texas annually are suicides, with 1,994 in 2015 or 63% of all gun deaths in the state. Texas' suicide by firearm rate is higher than the national average.
- Texas veterans represent about 10 percent of the Texas population, but represent about 18 percent of suicides in Texas. Among younger veterans, suicides are responsible for 32 percent of deaths.
- An estimated 200,000 children live in homes with unlocked, loaded firearms in Texas.
- Nationally, more than half of the youth who took their own life with a gun obtained the gun from their home; usually it was a parent's gun.
- Most public health experts agree that suicide is preventable. If more people recognized the signs of suicide and understood the risk of unsecured firearms, many Texans' lives could be saved.

Model Programs

- The Harvard School of Public Health worked with a group of mental health and public health practitioners, and firearm retailers to develop "The Gun Shop Project." The project develops materials for firearm retailers and range owners on ways they can help prevent suicide.
- The National Rifle Association and National Shooting Sports Foundation have partnered on suicide prevention, and have worked collaboratively on programs to address the issue nationwide.

Recommendations

- **Pass HB 631, relating to a public awareness campaign on firearms safety and suicide prevention.** A campaign will help educate the public on the risks of unsecured firearms and the importance of gun safety.
- **Pass SB 1778 and HB 3340,** which would direct the Department of Public Safety to include a message about the high suicide rate in Texas and the importance of securing access to firearms when a family member is at high risk of harming themselves or others in the License to Carry training curriculum. Include the 1-800 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in the LTC training. Within existing resources, direct the Health and Human Services Commission and Department of Public Safety to include information on safe storage of firearms and the 1-800 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number on their websites, with emphasis on pages related to veterans and teens. DPS and/or HHSC should be authorized to partner with and utilize other organizations' resources like the gun shop project to provide suicide prevention information and the 1-800 suicide prevention number to licensed firearm dealers, shooting ranges, and gun shows.
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