

I wish to submit written testimony in favor of Senate Bill SB 945....

According to a study in 2000, more than 40% of gun-owning households with children store their guns unlocked. As many as 14% of keep them are kept loaded, as well. It can come as no surprise, then, that many of these children access these gun and handle them unsafely, take them to school, unintentionally shoot themselves and others, purposely use them to threaten or harm others, or commit suicide with them. News articles to this effect come across my screen every single day, and a depressing number of them are from Oregon.

According to a study from 1999, more than 75% of the guns used in youth suicide attempts and unintentional injuries were stored in the residence of the victim, a relative, or a friend.

In October of 2000, the U.S. Secret Service published a study of 37 school shootings in 26 states. That study found that in more than 65% of the cases, the attacker got the gun from his or her own home or that of a relative.

Between 1999-2007, according to the CDC, 84 Oregon children died from firearms in suicides, and 15 died in unintentional shootings. The rate of suicides due to firearms for that age group was higher for Oregon than the overall rate for the United States.

On a more personal level, beyond the statistics, my own life has been impacted by children accessing their family's guns.

I grew up in a home with guns, and my mother kept a loaded revolver under her mattress for safety. But I can remember my older brother playing with it as a young teen and showing it off to a friend of his. Later, that gun, and several others, were stolen.

When I was 14, a young friend of mine, who was overweight and socially awkward, and likely depressed, got hold of his father's loaded, unsecured .45 revolver and shot himself in the head in an apparent suicide.

Four years later, I was at the mall to pick up a friend when I witnessed an argument between two teen boys, ages 16 and 18. I was only five feet away when the younger one pulled out a loaded 9mm semi-auto handgun and shot the older one in the head. As the shooter ran away, I held the dying teen in my hands and tried to feel for a pulse. I then chased down the suspect, scaring him back to the scene of the crime, where he was arrested. He later plead guilty of murder.

A couple years later, the 16-year old younger brother of a friend of mine, who was in a gang, attacked, robbed, and shot to death an old man on federal land. He is still on federal death row in Terra Haute, Indiana.

I wish these incidents from my past were unique, but we hear stories like these every day in America. But the thing that they all have in common is that a loaded gun was allowed to fall into the hands of a minor, and the owners of those guns were not held accountable. If a law had required that the guns be stored locked, and the owners knew they would be held accountable for allowing these guns to get into the hands of children, these people may have still been alive today.

Child Access Protection laws, like Senate Bill 945, have protected untold numbers of children AND adults across the nation.

According to a 1997 study, in 12 states where CAP laws had been in effect for at least one year, unintentional firearm deaths fell by 23% from 1990-94 among children under 15 years old.

CAP laws are correlated with reducing gun suicides among those aged 14 through 17 by 10.8%, and CAP laws are correlated with a reduction of non-fatal gun injuries among both children and adults by 30-40%.

With statistics like this, how can a feeling person not support such a law? The results are clear and reproducible.

The gun guys will try to tell you that it is an unsafe inconvenience to have to unlock and load a gun in the event of a break-in. But the few seconds it takes is a far lesser sacrifice than the daily endangerment of our children -- including children who visit the home. In fact, for less than \$150, you can purchase a handgun safe that unlocks with a fingerprint recognition in only seconds!

Children are naturally curious and impetuous, and even the most well-behaved and well-trained child will occasionally act on impulse. I have two young children of my own, ages 9 and 10. I know very well that no amount of warnings or training can overcome their normal, childish curiosity to explore things that are otherwise forbidden or dangerous. The thought that they could enter the home of a friend, where a gun might be stored unlocked, is one that frightens me to the core.

I urge you to support and vote YES for Senate Bill 945.

Every gun in the hands of a child must first pass through the hands of an adult. It's time to hold those adults accountable, demand that they lock their guns, and protect our children!

Sincerely,

Jason A. Kilgore