

Comments in Support of House Bill 3513
From David Westbrook, Chief Operating Officer, Lines for Life
March 28, 2023
House Judiciary Committee

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chair Anderson, Vice-Chair Wallan and members of the committee, My name is David Westbrook and I am the Chief Operating Officer at Lines for Life. Lines for Life is a nonprofit whose mission is to prevent suicide, and substance abuse and promote mental wellness. We operate crisis lines, provide suicide prevention, intervention and postvention services. Last year we took over a 150,000 calls, texts and chats. We answer the new 988 line as well as specialty lines for youth, military members, seniors and others.

I am here today to provide testimony in support of 3513.

It might seem from media coverage that most people who die by guns are those who are killed in mass shootings and murders. The sad fact is that suicide where a gun is the means account for more deaths in America each year than all of the homicides and unintentional injuries combined. This may come as a surprise to some but not to those of us who spend our days trying to prevent suicide. We know that time and distance matter.

Regularly at Lines for Life, on 988 and our other crisis lines our staff find themselves in conversation with individuals who disclose they are in possession of a gun and are planning to or are thinking about ending their life. When this happens, the conversation turns to where the gun is in the moment. In those instances where the individual is holding the gun as they speak with our crisis worker, the conversation quickly turns toward the possibility of the caller putting the gun in another room. This distancing is the beginning of building safety with that individual. Time after time we find that when a person separates themselves from the means by which they are intending to end their life they are able to begin exploring possibilities other than dying.

Once someone can see an alternative to dying, it is standard practice in suicide intervention to build a safety plan with any individual who has thoughts of suicide. When a person already has the means by which they intend to die, a piece of every safety plan is working through what to do with those means so long as the individual continues to have thoughts of suicide. In many suicide safety plans having someone else hold onto the means is the best solution. When the means is a gun, there can be people who want to help but may have considerations that keep them from being willing to take the step of holding the firearm.

If passed, House Bill 3513 will become a tool that our staff at Lines for Life can and will use to help people from ending their life by suicide. With this bill in place we'll be able to share with callers information on where to take their firearm for safe storage while they or a loved one is struggling with thoughts of dying.

Of the many bills you'll consider this legislative session a small handful of them have the potential to be lifesaving. House Bill 3513 is one such bill which is why we at Lines for Life support and I hope you will join us in that support by voting for it.