



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
 ONE UNION STATION
 PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
 401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

**Testimony Re: House Bill 5553, An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses –
 Weapons – Safe Storage
 House Judiciary Committee
 March 19, 2021
 Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would also like to thank Representatives Caldwell, Knight, Blazejewski, Kazarian, Craven, McNamara, Batista, Felix, Ajello, and McEntee for sponsoring this important bill. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 5553, which would make it a felony for the owner of any firearm to store the firearm unlocked. Failure to store the firearm locked would subject the owner to a fine of not more than three thousand dollars (\$3,000). If the owner of a firearm leaves it loaded and a child gains access and causes injury, then the owner can be subject to a penalty of up to five years imprisonment and/or a fine of not more than five thousand dollars (\$5,000).

Nationally and in Rhode Island, gun reform remains a key area of focus, especially in the wake of several tragic school and mass shootings over the past decade. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT believes comprehensive state policies to reduce gun violence are long overdue. **House Bill 5553 is a practical step to reduce gun injuries and increase the safety of children in Rhode Island.**

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Gun-Related Emergency Department (ED) Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Among Children and Youth, Rhode Island, 2014-2018

AGE	# OF ED VISITS	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS	# OF DEATHS
1 to 14	52	4	0
15 to 17	48	12	4
18 to 19	53	20	4
TOTAL	153	36	8

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, 2014-2018.

Note: Effective October 1, 2015, the International Classification of Disease (ICD) codes changed from the 9th classification to the 10th classification, which may impact comparability across the years.

In Rhode Island between 2014 and 2018, there were 153 emergency department visits, 36 hospitalizations, and 8 deaths of children and youth due to guns.

This law would encourage families to store guns safely, which would reduce the likelihood of a child being injured, hospitalized, or killed by a gun that he or she has found unlocked and unsecured. It would also reduce the likelihood that a child, teen, or adult would, be able to access a gun and use it to take his or her own life, a risk that is particularly urgent with the increase in depression and suicidality we are seeing associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

We strongly urge you to pass House Bill 5553, which would require gun owners to store guns in locked containers or with mechanical locks engaged to make the guns inoperable. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.