



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: House Bill 5555, An Act Relating to Criminal Offenses – Weapons

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 Kazarian, Diaz, Ajello, Ranglin-Vassell, Fogarty, Caldwell, Blazejewski, McEntee, Carson, and Cortvriend for sponsoring this important bill. **Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 5555**, which would prohibit the possession of firearms on school grounds except for peace officers, retired law enforcement officers, or individuals under contract to provide school security services. This bill includes an exception for firearms that are not loaded and that are stored in a locked container or a locked rack that is in a motor vehicle.

Nationally and in Rhode Island, gun reform remains a key area of focus, especially in the wake of several tragic school shootings over the past decade. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT believes comprehensive state policies to reduce gun violence are long overdue. **House Bill 5555 is a practical step to reduce gun injuries and increase the safety of children in Rhode Island's schools.**



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.

According to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, Rhode Island is one of only 7 states that does not have a law prohibiting concealed carry permit holders from carrying firearms in K-12 schools. We suspect that many Rhode Island parents would be surprised and concerned to learn that Rhode Island does not have a law prohibiting teachers, principals, nurses, coaches, custodians, cafeteria workers, volunteers, parents, or anyone else with a permit from carrying a concealed weapon onto school grounds.

Without a statute in place, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is deeply concerned that a weapon could be accessed and accidentally or intentionally fired by a student, teacher, or other school personnel. We think that the presence of guns in schools makes students less safe and increases the likelihood that a tragedy could occur as the result of an accidental, intentional, or self-inflicted shooting. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to bring Rhode Island in line with most other states and our neighbors – all New England states except New Hampshire have banned guns, including concealed carry, on school property – by passing House Bill 5555 to keep guns out of schools and off school grounds.

Additionally, we would like to voice our strong support for the following bills that we believe would help prevent children from suffering and dying from gun injuries:

- **House Bills 5553**, which would require gun owners to store guns in locked containers or with mechanical locks engaged to make the guns inoperable;
- **House Bill 5554**, which would ban semi-automatic firearm magazines that can hold more than ten rounds of ammunition; and
- **House Bill 5556**, which would ban the possession, sale, and transfer of assault weapons.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.