



Protect NC Children: Strengthen North Carolina's Safe Storage Law

What is the Safe Storage Law?

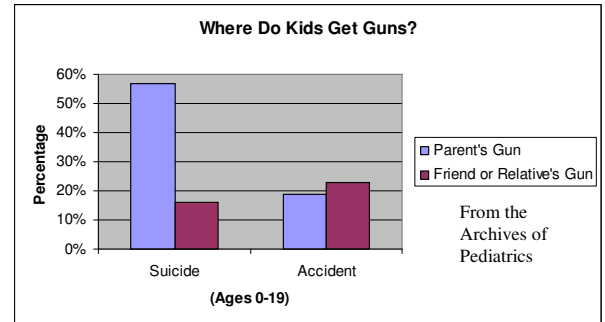
North Carolina is one of 18 states that require firearms to be stored so that they are inaccessible to minors. Although our state has recognized the need for firearm owners to follow safe storage practices, the majority of accidental youth shootings and youth gun suicides are carried out with a firearm from their own home. Easy access to guns in the home increases the number of juvenile victims and the injuries and deaths caused by guns.

Why is it important to improve the safe gun storage law?

The current law provides no recommendations for safe storage resulting in the law being enforceable only *after* a juvenile illegally uses the gun and cannot be used to prevent youth crime, death, and injury. Additionally, with no clear standard on safe firearm storage the law remains difficult for law enforcement and prosecutors to enforce.

The primary purpose of Safe Storage laws is to provide guidelines for preventive measures for gun owners in order to prevent accidental shootings and youth suicides—*our current law does not meet this requirement*. Proper safe storage of firearms also reduces the number of firearms stolen from homes resulting in illegal guns in our communities, and reduces the number of guns brought onto public school campuses.

According to a study conducted by the American Pediatric Association **168,000** children in NC live in a home with a loaded gun and **82,000** NC children live in a home with a loaded and unlocked gun. Improper storage of firearms can directly contribute to youth suicide **in North Carolina from 2004-2006 48% of youth suicide deaths were firearm related**. The Harvard School of Public Health **found that 85% of youths who died by firearm suicide deaths used a family member's gun, usually their own parents**. According to the 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Survey 1 in 5 NC High School students had reported carrying a weapon in the last 30 days and 1 in 14 reported carrying a weapon on a school campus in the last 30 days.



Nearly 2/3 of parents with school age children who keep a gun in the home believe that the firearm is safe from their children

However, 75-80% of second graders knew where the gun was kept

What about gun safety education programs? Can't they be used to keep kids away from guns?

NCGV believes that gun safety programs are crucial in protecting our children. However, gun safety education programs for children have been used in place of strengthening the law and have shown varying levels of success. A study published in the June 2001 issue of the Journal of Pediatrics suggests that most boys, even after being educated about gun safety, will find and handle a gun.

When 64 boys age 8 to 12 were left in a room with a handgun concealed in a drawer, over half handled the gun and some even pulled the trigger. The study found that more than 75 percent of the boys who handled the gun or pulled the trigger reported having had some form of gun safety education. North Carolinians Against Gun Violence supports gun safety programming in conjunction with a stronger safe storage laws.

How can we improve the current law to provide safer homes for our children?

NCGV supports legislation which will strengthen North Carolina's safe storage law. We propose a bill which makes clear recommendations for safe storage. Additionally, we support legislation that applies to any gun owner with an emphasis on one who has children visit their home. Most importantly we ask that any proposed legislation provide that if a child should gain possession of a gun and commit a crime, the adult will only be charged if the gun is not stored according to the safe storage recommendations—thus providing protection for gun owners who follow preventive safe storage efforts. NCGV believes that legislation which allows for greater public education efforts to gun owners and parents and for clearer standards for prosecution will directly result in reduced child gun deaths.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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