

Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee

Chair: Representative Kelly Moller

HF 396, 14, 15, 601

Friday, February 3, 2023, 8:30 AM

Capitol Room 120

IN SUPPORT

To members of the Minnesota House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

I am writing to voice my unqualified support for HF 396, HF 14, HF 15 and HF 601. This suite of firearm safety legislation is a crucial and overdue step in advancing the safety of Minnesotans.

As a family physician practicing in Coon Rapids, I am appalled that firearm deaths are now the leading cause of child mortality in the US. I speak with my patients and their families regularly about the importance of appropriately securing guns in their homes and have begun providing free trigger locks to increase the currently low number of gun-owning households in which firearms are properly stored. Parents often falsely believe that their children do not know where guns are stored in their home, and studies demonstrate that many children report handling guns in their home without their parents' knowledge. In addition, widespread implementation of safe storage practices adds a barrier of time and space that can prevent a suicidal or homicidal impulse from becoming a fatal reality. Most youth firearm suicides are completed with a gun owned by the victim's parents. HF 396 moves to bring state policy into alignment with known best practices for keeping children and communities safe from the destructive potential of improperly secured firearms in Minnesota homes. In instances where secure storage fails and firearms do become lost or stolen, HF 601 requires reporting to law enforcement as an additional measure to ensure public safety.

While children in homes with improperly stored firearms are at risk of harm from guns, there are many other factors that may increase the risk of an individual harming themselves or others with firearms. These include intimate partner violence, recent job or relationship loss, drug or alcohol abuse, dementia or cognitive impairment and depression. In appropriate high-risk situations, the ability to remove firearms from a person with demonstrable risk of harming themselves or others can be lifesaving. The implementation of extreme risk protection orders as proposed in HF 15 arms law enforcement and the judiciary with a critical tool for mitigating violence in our communities, especially against our most vulnerable citizens. Such a surgical approach strikes an appropriate balance between the right to keep and bear arms and an individual's right to be free from violence, coercion, threats and intimidation.

Doctors receive vast amounts of training and are scrutinized closely to obtain and maintain our authorization to practice medicine. This is appropriate because of the great potential of our decisions both to help and to harm. The potential to harm is wielded widely by gun-owners, but often with zero or minimal training or scrutiny. HF 14 and its expansion of requirements for criminal background checks in the setting of firearm transfers removes a dangerous gap in our current net of gun safety measures.

I am encouraged that Minnesota's lawmakers are taking action to protect their communities and to stem the public health crisis of gun violence. I implore you to support HF 396, HF 14, HF 15 and HF 601 and to move these critical pieces of legislation onward to passage and implementation. This is good medicine for Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Mary Tschida, MD
Family Medicine
Brooklyn Park, MN

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