

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 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 all Minnesotans.

As a family physician practicing in North Minneapolis, it is appalling that firearm deaths are now the leading cause of child mortality in the US. In addition, exposure to gun violence has left children and adults battling mental illnesses such as Post Traumatic Disorder (PTSD) amongst others. When an 8-year-old child is asking his doctor to prematurely end his visit so that he can make it in time to stand against gun violence in his community, it is time to task ourselves and our legislators with the duty to enact legislation that protects the lives and mental well-being of our children and Minnesotans. Others in family medicine are providing gun safety locks in a bid to increase safety. 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 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 is 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. This 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 extensive training and scrutinization to obtain and maintain authorization to practice medicine. This is appropriate as our decisions, or the lack thereof, could be beneficial or harmful. 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 hopeful that Minnesota's legislators are lending their best efforts to protect their communities; and to confront 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 our children. This is good medicine for Minnesotans.

Sincerely,

Caroline Bwari Nyamweya Tekeste, DO

Minnetonka

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