

Mr. or Ms. Chairperson and members of the committee.

My name is Allen Soderbeck. I am a concerned citizen for public safety and citizen rights.

I am testifying against bill House File 396 for the reasons I will outline.

First, I come from a position of knowledge. I have been around firearms since I was about 6 years old. I retired from the military after 27 years serving over 20 years as a commissioned Army infantry officer. I am a certified firearms instructor and range safety officer, a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) firearms safety instructor and a high school shooting sports coach. I am one of the coaches the Jordan Clay target team and have been a youth coach for ten years. I believe in giving back to the community.

Clay target is the fastest growing sport in high school within Minnesota and the Nation. It also the safest sport according to the statistics. Every year in Minnesota 10,000-12,000 young people safely discharge a few million rounds of shotgun shells in practice and competition. Any student athlete must complete the DNR firearm safety course prior to registration. I encourage you to come and watch this sport some time as the spring season is just about to begin. As written, this bill will shut down this sport. The bill does not define "authorized user", but it does define "child" which would include most of the youth on all teams.

Even DNR firearms safety training will be shut down. Part of this training is to familiarize them with firearms and then shoot one. We use very basic .22 bolt action rifle for familiarization. As written, I cannot hand this "firearm" to a "child" in this scenario. Again, we should be encouraging everyone to learn firearm safety.

I use real firearms in my own home to teach my young grandchildren about firearms. Using cleared and safe pistols and rifles, I instruct them in family procedures and also test the children. Our family rule is to tell an adult if they find a firearm. I know that if they are anywhere, they know the difference, will not pick one up to play with it and will tell a responsible adult. This bill would make me a felon for doing the right thing.

Safe storage is a relative term. As defined in this bill, "safe" storage makes most people in their homes prime targets for criminals. Criminals do not care about the law, but they do understand the law and use it to their advantage. Once they believe that all firearms must be "safely" locked away, they are free to attack without consequences. I live in a semi-rural area. Here, help is not just a few minutes away. When seconds count, we cannot depend on a deputy to be driving by. If all guns need to be safely locked away, then they are not readily accessible to defend oneself. So what we will find, is that this bill will make the community less safe.

The negative consequences of this bill are many.

For the young people involved in the clay target sports, they will lose this opportunity. Many are not drawn to stick and ball sports. It gives them a great way to be part of a team and learn the safe use of a firearm. Safe use of firearms should be encouraged not eliminated.

Secondly, imposing the government mandate of this bill eliminates one's right to self defense with a firearm. That is in conflict with the Second Amendment. The right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. In this context, keep means to keep in the home, etc.

Lastly and maybe most importantly, the penalty included in this bill is so high for violating subdivision 1, that I cannot understand the reasoning other than that this is an attempt to disarm the law-abiding portion of the Minnesota population. A felony? Does the punishment fit the supposed crime in this case? I suggest it does not.

The bill will make the community less safe overall. But we should do something.

I want to offer some suggestions in lieu of the wording of this bill. A collaboration in the name of real safety is the best plan in my opinion.

First, let's encourage firearms safety for everyone. Offer incentives for storage options and classes. It will be much easier to change behaviors with the carrot than the stick in most of Minnesota. Some states actually offer firearms safety classes as part of the school curriculum.

Secondly, enforce the existing penalties for firearms crimes related to this. If there is a young child and an irresponsible parent, then that is child endangerment. Use that process. Many Minnesotans are convicted of drunk driving every year, yet there is no bill to ban all cars and trucks. We have existing laws that address the behavior and child endangerment if it applies.

I hope that through this testimony you may see the issues in this bill.

Thank you for your time and attention.