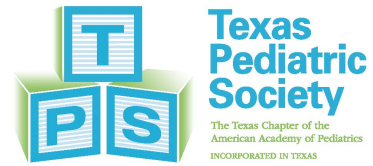




Physicians Caring for Texans



**House Culture, Recreation, and Tourism Committee
House Bill 909 by Rep. Barbara Gervin-Hawkins
Testimony by Thomas Kim, MD
Texas Medical Association and Texas Pediatric Society
*March 15, 2021***

Chair King and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Texas Medical Association (TMA) and Texas Pediatric Society (TPS). Our testimony today supports House Bill 909 and addresses the importance of improving public awareness of firearm safety and encouraging community efforts to prevent firearm violence.

The U.S. has the highest firearm homicide and firearm-related suicide rates of all high-income countries.¹ The most recent available data from 2016 showed Texas having more firearm-related deaths than any other state – 3,353 – a rate of 12.1 per 100,000 people.² Firearm-related injury is the second most common cause of death among U.S. children. Homicide, suicide, and unintentional discharge all contribute to child fatality. The American Academy of Pediatrics reports that most parents believe their children will not touch a firearm or do not know where firearms are kept in the home. But in 2015, 609 Texas children were injured or died by a firearm. More than 200 of these were deaths from a suicide, assault or homicide, and accidental firearm discharge, or with an undetermined intent. More than half of these child deaths were homicides, and most deaths were in children aged 15-19 years.

Texas' requirements for the safe firearm storage and firearm security are critical to support the prevention of theft or the misuse of firearms by adults and children. We know most parents with firearms in the home will talk to their children about firearm safety, but not all do – which increases risk in the home, especially if adults or children within the household are prone to impulsive decisions. The public health data tell us that children who are with an untrained or otherwise careless adult or a friend with access to a firearm are most likely to be injured or killed in an unintentional discharge.

Keeping firearms away from people who present a risk of harm or who are unable to make sound decisions provides a strong base for managing firearm safety. But having strong state laws on firearm safety will not adequately ensure protection if the public is not aware of these requirements or of effective measures to reduce firearm violence. We believe Representative Hawkins' proposal to designate June as Gun Violence Awareness Month will improve ongoing public dialogue to better prevent firearm-related injuries and deaths.

TMA and TPS members remain focused on proven prevention and harm reduction methods in all areas of public health. Physicians have a role in addressing gun violence and firearms safety. We are talking to our patients about safety measures in the home, including the measures that will prevent firearm mortality and morbidity. We encourage you to take action to approve House Bill 909, and we offer our assistance with implementation of this important legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and I am happy to take any questions.

¹ Grinshteyn E & Hemenway D, Violent Death Rates: The U.S. Compared with Other High-income OECD Countries, 2010, *The American Journal of Medicine*; Richardson EG, Hemenway D, Homicide, suicide, and unintentional firearm fatality; comparing the United States with other high-income countries, *J. Trauma Injury, Infection, and Critical Care* 70: 238-43.

² Louisiana, Alabama, and Alaska had the highest rates of firearm mortality in the country in 2016 (21.3 to 23.3 per 100,000).