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Ohio Chapter

**Testimony of Bill Cotton, MD, FAAP**  
*Senate Bill 221 – Firearms Regulation (Dolan)*

December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today as a proponent of Senate Bill 221, sponsored by State Senator Matt Dolan. My name is Bill Cotton and I am a pediatrician in Columbus. I am here today on behalf of the nearly 3,000 members of the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics to offer our support for this important legislation.

Gun violence is a constant fixture in the news, and it has torn apart many communities across the nation. In Ohio, we have had to endure tragedies in Chardon and Dayton more recently. I want to commend Governor DeWine for bringing together advocates from diverse backgrounds to answer the call to ‘do something’ about gun violence.

I’d like to share a brief story about how we can achieve results through collaboration and understanding. Three years ago, the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics set out to address the increase in unintentional firearm injuries and deaths and adolescent suicide by firearm. We launched a partnership with Buckeye Firearms Association, Black Wing Shooting Center, and other partners to provide education and resources to pediatricians as well as to distribute gun lock boxes to parents at well child checks.

The results have been overwhelmingly positive. We have given out nearly 1,000 gun boxes and dramatically improved the interaction between parents and providers. More importantly, we forged a valuable partnership with Second Amendment advocates, which is a community that we have historically fought against. By taking the time to listen and learn from these groups, we were able to have a positive impact on the safety and wellbeing of Ohio children.

It is my belief that SB 221 will have a positive impact on gun violence in Ohio through a variety of policy changes. Most notably, SB 221 makes the following reforms to Ohio law—

- Improves the quality of information required to be reported to background check databases;
- Expands state laws related to emergency custody and evaluation, often called pink slip laws, to include all forms of drug and alcohol abuse;
- Creates a new voluntary process and background check system for an individual selling a firearm privately to obtain a seller's protection certificate;
- Strengthens penalties related to the unlawful transfer of a weapon and other firearms related crimes.

Most notably, SB 221 would establish a new process for safety protection orders that would allow firearms to be seized from an individual who is either disqualified from firearms ownership or threatening violence or self-harm. These new protection orders would serve as a last resort to avoid a violent action on the part of an individual struggling with drug or alcohol addiction or a mental health issue. Hopefully, lives would be saved by removing a firearm and getting these individuals the help, they need.

There remains a strong linkage between firearms regulations and injuries and death to children. In fact, a study published earlier this year by Children's National Health System found that pediatric firearm-related injuries and fatalities were significantly lower in states with strong firearms regulations. Interestingly, the authors argued that there is not a single silver bullet or policy that can fully address gun violence. Instead, they argued that collaborative laws addressing various aspects of the gun violence epidemic, like those contained in SB 221, are the most effective way to reduce pediatric injuries and fatalities.

In closing, swift passage of SB 221 has the potential to save lives and reduce firearm-related injuries and fatalities in Ohio. This bill represents the kind of collaborative and meaningful approach we should take in address gun violence and I hope you will favorably report the measure.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.