

Ohio Chapter

INCORPORATED IN OHIO

American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

November 29th, 2022

The Honorable Matt Dolan
Chairman, Finance Committee
Ohio Senate
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Dolan and Members of the Senate Finance Committee—

On behalf of the nearly 3,000 members of the Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, I am writing today to express our support for Senate Bill 357, sponsored by State Senator Dolan. 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 believe we must all come together 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, 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 through the Store It Safe program. The results have been overwhelmingly positive. We have given out thousands of gun boxes and 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.

In keeping with the spirit of this collaboration and seeking a positive path forward, I firmly believe that Senate Bill 357 is a positive step and should be swiftly enacted. The bill includes several good policy changes, including: creating safety protection orders to remove firearms from individuals who are at risk of committing a violent act, expanding laws surrounding court-ordered mental health evaluations and treatment, strengthening Ohio’s background check system, and adding more security and safety to private party firearm sales. SB 357 also includes language raising the age of purchase for firearms from 18 to 21. We strongly support this policy change. Finally, SB 357 invests \$175 million into Ohio’s behavioral health workforce and facilities. This is a critical investment that will help us meet the ever-increasing need for mental health services.

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There remains a strong linkage between firearms regulations and injuries and death to children. In fact, a study published in 2019 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 357, are the most effective way to reduce pediatric injuries and fatalities.

It is my hope that the committee will favorably report SB 357 in the near future. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melissa Wervey Arnold".

Melissa Wervey Arnold
Chief Executive Officer
Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

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