

OHIO'S VOICE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION



## **House Public Safety Committee SB273 Proponent Testimony**

March 3, 2026

9:30 a.m.

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of SB273, that will give firearm retailers the option to be a safe storage facility in their local communities.

My name is Tony Coder and I am the CEO of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, a non-profit focused on breaking stigma around suicide, but also providing strategies for communities, individuals and families to improve opportunities for mental health wellness.

Ohio loses nearly five people every day to suicide, with 1833 people dying in 2024, which would be a 56 person increase over the 2023 death by suicide total of 1777 according to preliminary state data from the Ohio Department of Health. 81% of those suicides are male, with the vast majority being men over the age of 25. Over half of those suicides involved a firearm, with 62% of suicides in males were by use of a firearm. We are also seeing that using a firearm is also the leading means by which a youth or young adult (ages 10-24) dies by suicide.

As we try to understand suicide, I want to reference a study by a renowned suicide researcher as he asked the question of suicide attempt survivors, “how much time passed between the time you decided to complete suicide and when you actually attempted suicide?” and one in four of those suicide attempt survivors said that the time was less than five minutes and nearly 70% said it was less than an hour. The power of being able to delay that

action by five minutes or less can save a life. So that means that driving to a firearms retailers – even if it is just around the corner – can be a move to save a life. That sounds really simple, but it can be something that is enough of an interruption to save a life.

And let us not forget that this can also save children. If any firearms owner has a child who is struggling with mental health and wants to get the firearm out of the house, this legislation can give the parent an opportunity to safely store their firearm until they feel that their child is in a better mental health space. Sadly, I am reminded of this because of a funeral of a 13 year old child that I attended. At the funeral, I spoke to the family and we spoke later, when the dad told me that they had heard their child arguing with someone on their phone in their room. They didn't know what upset their child, but the child stormed out of the room, picked up the father's firearm that was sitting beside him on a table and went outside and that was it. They knew that their child had been struggling with some mental health issues and with some kids at school, but they never believed that this would be the outcome.

SB 273 is a piece of legislation that we support because this is not a mandated program but is a voluntary opportunity available to firearm retailers to store a person's firearms and save lives. Even a handful of seconds for someone who is contemplating suicide can save a life. This is not and should not be a partisan issue – this is a human issue. No matter where anyone lies on the political or ideological scale, we can all agree that no family should have to endure the devastating loss of a loved one to suicide. Would this legislation end suicide? No, but it can be another tool and give firearm retailers an even stronger opportunity to save lives of their customers, their neighbors and their friends, if they are in need. This is another tool to help curb veteran and first responder suicide, as well. By supporting this legislation, you are helping individuals who veterans, young people and those struggling with mental health.

I am grateful for your time and for allowing me to testify as a proponent of SB 273 with firearm retailers, a partnership that I am proud to have. I am also grateful for your leadership and partnership on addressing Ohio's suicide issue. I would be happy to answer any questions.