

# Ohio Chapter

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American Academy of Pediatrics

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## *Testimony of Dr. Sarah Denn, MD, FAAP* Senate Health Committee Hearing on House Bill 96 May 13, 2025

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Listeon and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in HB 96 regarding the Store It Safe program related to the Ohio Department of Health. My name is Sarah Denny, President elect of the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (Ohio AAP), and I am here today on behalf of our 2900 members. Ohio AAP promotes the health, safety and well-being of children and adolescents so they reach their full potential. Our organization is the state's strongest network of pediatric professionals impacting over 1 million children through our programs and education each year.

I am here today to ask the state to consider an amendment to the budget to support the work of the **Store It Safe** program, a program that focuses on reversing the trend of irreversible actions due to suicide and the safe storage of lethal means to prevent intentional and unintentional deaths in children and adolescents. In 2015, Ohio AAP leadership established the **Store It Safe** program. The program brought together organizations and individuals with different viewpoints about firearms to develop unified, nonpartisan messaging, resources and approaches to reduce unintentional firearm injuries and deaths in children, then expanded to address suicides by firearms in adolescents. Over the years, the program has grown to include a wide variety of education, advocacy, quality improvement and community initiatives, it has also evolved to include additional lethal means.

In my role as a primary care pediatrician at Nationwide Children's Hospital, I have seen the dramatic increase of adolescent suicide over the past 10 years, making it the second leading cause of death in people 10-25 years old in the US. I have seen first hand the mental health crisis we are facing and I have had to counsel families after the loss of a child who has completed suicide. The statistics are staggering:

- In 2023, 16% of high school students made a suicide plan
- 1 in 5 teens have thoughts of suicide each day
- 85% of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in adolescents

*One study reported that 64% of families with guns store them inappropriately and accessible to children, and of the youth who completed suicide by a firearm, 82% used a gun from their home.* And finally, with the expansion of cannabis sales in Ohio, in 2024 Ohio Poison Control Centers responded to over 1,400 cannabis related poisoning exposures with pediatric exposures accounting for 75% of these exposures.

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### Ohio Chapter

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**Store It Safe** is the **ONLY** program that brings together *injury prevention/safety advocates and firearm/gun-owner rights advocates* to thoughtfully address this crisis. When the program began, it was started with the invaluable input and support of the Buckeye Firearms Association, where we came together to find the common ground that we all felt would make an impact in saving lives, and that is storing the firearm safely. But as the program grew, we quickly saw the need to not just talk about storing firearms safely, but also additional lethal means such as over the counter medications, Tylenol and even cannabis. The “it” in Store It Safe, is bigger than just firearms, and the conversations and guidance provided to families in the program can be life saving.

We have piloted the quality improvement portion of the program in practices for the past 3 years and we have the data that shows this program works. As part of the program, all adolescents are screened for depression and suicide, counseled and provided resources when indicated and offered means to store lethal means safely. This is done in a NON judgemental way, and no information is tracked around who owns firearms or who takes the boxes.

## RESULTS TO DATE:

- More than 130,000 Ohioans have already been reached by the SIS program,
- 1,600 healthcare providers were trained in the SIS program,
- 14,000 adolescents have been screened for depression and suicide during healthcare visits
- Over 3,500 lock boxes have been distributed
- Increase lethal means discussion rates from 28 percent to 100 percent and suicide screenings increased from 13% to 71%

The Department of Health has provided over \$700,000 of funding over the past ten years through federal grants. The state’s continued support of this program is critically important in the scale and spread of this work. We recognize the constraint on state funding at thist time, so we are not seeking additional funds, however, we believe establishing the SIS as Ohio’s inury prevention/safety program will ensure the nearly ten years of investment by the state and work by the SIS partners can continue without any future diversion of funds. Our proposed amendment would:

- 1) Establish **Store It Safe** under the Ohio Department of Health as the State’s program when discussing lethal means safe storage
- 2) Allows for continuation of the quality improvement work and additional SIS program spread
- 3) Continues the Store It Safe brand on lock boxes the the Ohio AAP will distribute to practices and community organizations and healthcare systems

We are proud to share the state of Indiana just adopted our program, and Michigan is currently looking to do the same.

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While this effort began in the pediatric and family medicine office setting first, this work has been expanded in cities, emergency departments, inpatient mental health facilities and many other community agencies all sharing the same message, “if you have anything of lethal means, store it safely.”

We hope you will support our request to officially establish the ***Store it Safe*** program for the state of Ohio.

Thank you Chair Huffman, and I am happy to answer any questions.

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