

TESTIMONY FOR SENATE BILL 156

PENALTY ADDED TO HAZARD STATUTE

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President

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We urge that the committee approve Senate Bill 156 in order to better assure the safety of children.

As more and more Kansans choose to purchase and keep guns, it is increasingly imperative that we demand at least minimal safety practices and legal responsibility.

Obviously, any gun regulation or requirement generates strong opinions on both sides. But surely we can agree that there should be consequence when children's welfare is recklessly put at risk.

According to public health research, one-third of American children live in homes with firearms. And in more than one-fourth of gun-owning households with children, the guns are unlocked (Johnson, 2004*).

That adds up to 1.7 million American children living in homes where guns are left unsecured and loaded.

The results of those irresponsible practices have been as expected. Federal data has shown that between 2007 and 2011 a yearly average of 62 American children age 14 and under were killed every year while playing with a family gun left loaded and unsecured. Another 660 were injured badly enough to require hospitalization.

With gun sales having risen dramatically in the years since these studies were conducted, the hazard surely is more significant.

Further, an exhaustive investigation by *The New York Times* in 2013, in which hundreds of child firearms deaths were examined, it was found that accidental shootings occurred roughly twice as often as records indicate. The discrepancy existed because of idiosyncrasies in how such deaths are classified by the authorities.

A 2014 study by Everytown for Gun Safety found that American children are 16 times more likely to die by accidental shooting in this country than in any other high-income nation. Most of the shooting (84 percent) occur in the home or in the family car. We can and must do better.

Many parents underestimate their children's knowledge of where their loaded guns are stored. In one study gun-owning parents said their children never had handled their firearm at home. When the children were questioned separately, 22 percent of them said they had handled the guns. (Baxley and Miller**)

It has been argued in these chambers by supporters of more liberalized gun regulations, especially regarding the discontinuance of training for a concealed-carry permit) that we can and should trust our fellow Kansans to get training on their own if they need it. We do not advocate passage of SB 156

because we do not trust Kansans. We do so because Kansas residency does not bestow a universal level of responsible behavior. This bill demands the minimum of gun owners: that they be held to account if they are so irresponsible as to expose young children to lethal weaponry.

*Johnson, Coyne-Beasley and Runyan "Firearm Ownership and Storage Practices, U.S. Households, 1992-2002). *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

* Baxley, Miller. "Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms." *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine* (2006)