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Imagine having to work every day with the impending fear of an attack looming over your head. Fear that you will never know for sure if you are safe. Fear that at any moment, your security could be threatened. This is something that, although many of you may not face, students all across Kansas experience. With an increase in school shootings in recent years, students and parents can no longer look to schools as safe-havens. Instead, schools are seen as areas that could be compromised at any time, a thought proven by the events that recently occurred at Olathe East. Although initiatives to help mitigate gun violence are needed, a collective effort must be made to promote initiatives that actually help to solve the issue at hand. Passing Bill SB 522 to expand the NRA Eddie Eagle program to focus on children in grades kindergarten through 8th grade is something that will not be beneficial at all to tackle the issue of gun violence. This is because it is extremely ineffective, and there are other alternatives that truly make a necessary impact regarding ending gun violence.

Firstly, Bill SB 522 is ineffective when it comes to addressing the issue of gun violence in a productive manner. The goal of the NRA Eddie Eagle program is to promote gun safety and prevent unintentional shootings by children. However, the number of unintentional shootings by children has actually increased. According to Everytown research, Unintentional shooting deaths by children increased by nearly one-third comparing incidents in March to December of 2020 to the same months of 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This increase has occurred while the current NRA Eddie Eagle program has been in place. This statistic attests to the fact that the sole purpose of the NRA Eddie Eagle program cannot be achieved in the slightest - as even with the program in place, we are seeing significantly more cases of gun violence now than ever before. In addition, studies have shown that the NRA Eddie Eagle program itself is not effective. According to a study conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the program was proven to be worthless when children who have been through it encounter guns in real-life situations. If the lessons that this program teaches cannot even be useful when a real situation arises when a child encounters a gun, then this program should not even be deemed to be effective. Along with these statistics and studies, recent events from our state have shown that we cannot waste time promoting ineffective programs such as Bill SB 522 with the NRA Eddie Eagle Program. The incident that happened at Olathe East just a few weeks ago was something that has shaken up many communities, including my own. I go to Olathe North and when I heard about the incident during school, I was frightened and concerned as I have many friends that go to East. I was also scared for my own school as well because if this occurred at East, it can easily occur at my school or another Olathe school. This event has caused my peers and I to feel scared whenever we go to school now since there is now an increased possibility of a school incident shooting occurring. Events like these make it clear that now is the time to work

on finding better solutions to target gun violence, and that means not expanding the NRA Eddie Eagle program that cannot even achieve what it intends to.

When we analyze what action the Kansas Legislature can take to address gun violence, it needs to be something that is concrete and effective. An example of an alternative solution is bills that require secure storage of firearms in households with children 18 and under. Another example could be to introduce red flag bills that remove guns from individuals that have a record of being high risk and violent. This is taking concrete action, as it targets the issue of gun violence at its source rather than trying to send ineffective messages to children who are not the reason as to why gun violence is an issue.

Gun violence is something that affects everyone - families, children, communities, and more. As a community, we must take proactive steps to ensure that something is being done to mitigate the harrowing issue of gun violence, and this means promoting bills and ideas that actually do something to target the issue of gun violence at its root. This is why I urge the members of the legislature to vote in opposition of Bill SB 522, as it fails to do anything to actually address the issue of gun violence. Voting in opposition of this bill will allow for more productive solutions to be introduced, solutions that can help to heal and protect our families, our children, and our state. Thank you.