



Written Testimony on Senate Bill 206 - School Suicide Policies; Firearm Storage Senate Health and Social Services Committee

Submitted by:

Lon Garrison

Executive Director, Association of Alaska School Boards (AASB)

Chair Dunbar and members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee,

For the record, my name is Lon Garrison, Executive Director of the Association of Alaska School Boards. AASB represents Alaska's locally elected school boards serving students and families in communities across our state—from our largest urban districts to small and remote village schools.

The Association of Alaska School Boards supports the intent and policy direction of Senate Bill 206. This legislation aligns closely with the priorities adopted by Alaska school boards through AASB's 2026 Legislative Priorities and our statewide policy framework, *Where We Stand 2026*. At the same time, we respectfully ask the committee to consider the practical implementation impacts on school districts to ensure the bill does not unintentionally create unfunded operational mandates.

Alignment with AASB Legislative Priorities

Senate Bill 206 most strongly advances AASB's legislative priority to **Support Student Achievement and Wellness**. Alaska's school boards recognize that safe, supportive, and connected learning environments are foundational to academic success. Students who feel safe and supported are more likely to attend school regularly, engage in learning, and graduate prepared for their futures.

The bill's emphasis on early reporting of harassment, intimidation, and bullying, along with improved coordination between schools and child advocacy centers, reflects AASB's long-standing commitment to prevention and early intervention. These concepts are embedded throughout our resolutions, *Where We Stand*, including:

- **Resolution 3.17 — Student Wellness**, supporting policies that address students' mental, physical, and emotional well-being;
- **Resolution 3.9 — Safe, Caring, and Connected Schools**, which calls for learning environments where students feel secure and supported;
- **Resolution 3.8 — Suicide Prevention, Education, and Treatment Efforts**, recognizing the importance of coordinated prevention strategies; and

- **Belief Statement B.15 — Prevention and Early Intervention**, emphasizing that early identification and partnership among schools, families, and communities reduces long-term harm to children.

SB 206 also strengthens **family engagement**, a principle supported by **Belief Statement B.13**, which recognizes parental involvement as one of the most important contributors to student success. Allowing districts to notify families when students experience bullying or show signs of suicide risk promotes shared responsibility between schools and parents during moments when timely communication can make a life-saving difference.

Finally, the creation of the firearm safe storage grant fund aligns with AASB **Resolution 5.36 — Safe and Secure Storage of Firearms**, supporting practical community-based approaches to reducing accidental injury and youth suicide risk. Providing safe storage devices through a state-administered program represents a prevention strategy consistent with evidence-based public health practice.

Respect for Local Governance

AASB appreciates that SB 206 preserves local decision-making authority. The bill allows, rather than mandates, school districts to adopt parental notification policies. This flexibility respects Alaska’s diverse communities and aligns with AASB’s foundational belief in local governance as articulated in **Belief Statement B.1 — Local Governance**.

Unfunded Mandate Considerations

While AASB supports the goals of SB 206, we encourage careful attention to implementation impacts.

Many education policies carry limited direct fiscal costs but create significant **operational responsibilities** for districts. SB 206 is likely to increase:

- administrative coordination with child advocacy centers,
- staff training requirements,
- documentation and reporting responsibilities,
- parent communication obligations, and
- counseling and follow-up workload resulting from increased reporting.

For large districts, these duties may be absorbed within existing systems. For small, rural districts—often operating with a single administrator or limited counseling staff—the additional responsibilities may represent a significant increase in workload. And, with the incredibly thin resources school district have today, some districts may simply not be able to comply.

AASB’s **Belief Statement B.8 — Unfunded Mandates** urges policymakers to consider the cumulative effect of statutory requirements placed upon school districts without accompanying

implementation resources. Alaska schools are already managing staffing shortages, rising operating costs, and constrained budgets. Even well-intended legislation can create strain when implementation capacity is not addressed.

We therefore encourage consideration of strategies that support successful implementation, such as:

- statewide training resources or standardized guidance materials;
- coordination through existing state safety or mental health programs;
- technical assistance for rural districts; or
- recognition within fiscal notes of administrative impacts at the local level.

Our goal is not to slow the bill's progress, but to ensure its success in practice.

Conclusion

SB 206 reflects values Alaska school boards strongly share: prevention, partnership with families, community collaboration, and the protection of student well-being. The legislation advances multiple AASB priorities and resolutions by strengthening early intervention systems and reinforcing safe learning environments.

With thoughtful attention to implementation capacity and avoidance of unintended unfunded mandates, SB 206 can become an effective tool supporting both student safety and local school governance.

On behalf of Alaska's locally elected school boards, AASB appreciates the committee's work on behalf of Alaska's children and respectfully supports the intent of Senate Bill 206 while encouraging continued attention to the impacts on district implementation.

Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to Alaska's students.

Lon Garrison

Executive Director

Association of Alaska School Boards

**International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
Local 1547**

3333 DENALI STREET, SUITE 200
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA 99503-4038

TELEPHONE DISPATCH FAX
(907) 272-6571 (907) 276-1547 (907) 777-7255

DOUG TANSY
BUSINESS MANAGER • FINANCIAL SECRETARY

CECIL COLLEY III
PRESIDENT



March 9, 2026

RE: Support for SB 206

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee:

I am the Business Manager of IBEW Local 1547 and am writing in support of Senate Bill 206. The construction trades suffer from some of the highest mental health and suicide rates, and our Local has unfortunately lost numerous members due to suicide. It is a crisis that needs to be addressed. Senate Bill 206 will hopefully help with this crisis by addressing suicide prevention at an early age.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Doug Tansy", is written over a faint, light blue outline map of the state of Alaska.

Doug Tansy
Business Manager
IBEW Local 1547



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Alaska

January 28, 2026

The Honorable Lōki Tobin
Alaska State Senate
State Capitol Room 115
120 4th Street
Juneau AK, 99801

RE: Support for SB 206 "An Act relating to reports of harassment, intimidation, or bullying in schools; relating to parental notification of incidents of harassment, intimidation, or bullying involving students and threats of suicide by students; and establishing the firearm safe storage grant fund."

Dear Senator Lōki Tobin:

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) Alaska Chapter writes in strong support of SB 206 to establish a statewide firearm safe storage grant fund and awareness initiative for Alaska schools. This legislation will help make lifesaving education a core component of firearm ownership and safety, reaching Alaska communities and homes where firearms are present and helping protect youth and families from firearm suicide.

We know that the risk of suicide increases when lethal means are readily accessible. When we talk about preventing suicide, we must also talk about firearm safety. Suicide is complex and never the result of a single factor. Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders—particularly when unaddressed—can increase suicide risk. That risk is significantly elevated when a firearm is accessible in the home.

Firearms are the most commonly used and most lethal method of suicide. Approximately 85–90 percent of suicide attempts involving a firearm result in death. In Alaska, firearms account for the majority of suicide deaths, and the state continues to experience firearm suicide rates that rank among the highest in the nation.

CDC Alaska-specific data show that in 2023, Alaska ranked among the top states for firearm suicide rates overall and had the fifth highest gun death rate in the country. Alaska also had the highest firearm suicide rate among American Indian and Alaska Native people, reflecting persistent and severe disparities that require focused, culturally responsive prevention strategies.

Firearm-related deaths also affect Alaska's children and families. According to CDC mortality data, firearms were the leading cause of death among Alaska youth ages 1 to 17 from 2019 to 2023. In addition, Alaska continues to experience a high number of domestic violence-related homicides involving firearms, increasing the lethality of these incidents and reinforcing the importance of safe firearm storage and education.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
2440 E. Tudor #191 | Anchorage, AK 99507
afsp.org/alaska | alaska@afsp.org
Tax ID 13-3393329



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

Alaska

Since 2016, AFSP has partnered nationally with the National Shooting Sports Foundation to produce and distribute firearm suicide prevention and secure storage education materials through more than 8,000 industry partners, including firearm retailers, ranges, and instructors. SB 206 would expand access to these evidence-based materials across Alaska, ensuring that firearm owners and families receive consistent, practical guidance on secure storage and suicide prevention.

Research consistently shows that increasing time and distance between a person at risk and a lethal method can save lives. When individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis are unable to access their chosen method, most do not go on to attempt suicide using another method. Temporary, voluntary secure storage during periods of heightened risk provides critically important time for crises to de-escalate and for intervention and support to occur.

AFSP is the leading national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide. Our Alaska Chapter carries out this mission statewide through education, advocacy, and community engagement. We firmly believe SB 206 will strengthen Alaska's suicide prevention efforts and help prevent the tragic and preventable loss of life.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to the safety and well-being of Alaskans.

Sincerely,
James Biela
AFSP – Alaska Advocacy Ambassador
Vice-Chair, AFSP National Public Policy Council
907-545-4675

Endnotes (Alaska-Specific Sources Only)

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). WISQARS Fatal Injury Reports: Firearm Suicide and Firearm Deaths — Alaska, 2019–2023.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). WISQARS Fatal Injury Data by Race/Ethnicity — Alaska American Indian/Alaska Native Populations.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). WISQARS Leading Causes of Death by Age Group — Alaska, Ages 1–17 (2019–2023).
4. Alaska Department of Health. Alaska Violent Death Reporting System (AK-VDRS): Domestic Violence–Related Homicides.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
2440 E. Tudor #191 | Anchorage, AK 99507
afsp.org/alaska | alaska@afsp.org
Tax ID 13-3393329



February 21, 2026

Chair Senator Forrest Dunbar and the
Members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee
120 4th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Senator Dunbar and Committee Members,

The League of Women Voters of Alaska urges you to support Senate Bill 206 relating to the Firearm Safe Storage Device Grant Fund. We understand that the Bill will result in safe storage devices (such as lockboxes, cable locks) for Alaska's school districts, allow districts to distribute these free devices to families, with priority for families of at-risk youth, and support education on the importance of secure firearm storage as a proven suicide prevention strategy.

The League believes that protecting the health and safety of Alaska's children and communities is a core responsibility of state government. While we respect the right of law-abiding Alaskans to own firearms, Alaska continues to experience high rates of firearm injury and death, particularly among youth. Secure firearm storage is a practical, preventive step that can help save lives.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. Please don't hesitate to contact me at mariannemills@msn.com or (907)723-0226 for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marianne Mills". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Marianne Mills, Co-President

From: Lei B <lxb312@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 24, 2026 4:50 PM

To: Senate Health and Social Services <Senate.HSS@akleg.gov>; Sen. Forrest Dunbar <Sen.Forrest.Dunbar@akleg.gov>; Sen. Cathy Giessel <Sen.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov>; Sen. Matt Claman <Sen.Matt.Claman@akleg.gov>; Sen. Robert Myers <Senator.Robert.Myers@akleg.gov>; Sen. Löki Tobin <Sen.Loki.Tobin@akleg.gov>

Subject: Support for SB 206

Thank you Madam Chair and respected committee member for hearing me out during telephonic testimony. I am sending this email in case any of the senate members were not present at the hearing.

I would like to thank you for your time to consider and hear my thoughts regarding the benefits of SB 206.

As a licensed mental health professional in Alaska, the number one concern that is in the back of my mind daily, is someone losing hope completely and ending their life. My whole career and professional dedication is focused on helping people avoid getting to that point. Or if unfortunately, they are there already, helping them turn the other way and start feeling more empowered to feel better.

Studies show that time between suicide ideation and action is an effective tool in preventing death. It allows for a moment of hesitation which can provide space for alternate options.

I believe this bill would be another step in ensuring our youth are residing in a healthier society than we have found it.

Teaching our community members including parents and kiddos to set themselves up for success by educating them on safe storage of firearms AND giving them the resources to practice that safety is crucial. I believe SB 206 would assist in ensuring that goal is achieved.

I urge you to pass SB 206. I appreciate your time and attention.

Thank you,

Lejla Berberovic, LCSW
Anchorage AK 99515

From: Bellamy_Margo <Bellamy_Margo@asdk12.org>

Sent: Friday, February 20, 2026 1:21 PM

To: Sen. Elvi Gray-Jackson <Sen.Elvi.Gray-Jackson@akleg.gov>; Sen. Löki Tobin <Sen.Loki.Tobin@akleg.gov>

Subject: Support for SB 206

Dear Senator Gray-Jackson and Senator Tobin,

I am writing to express my strong support for **SB 206**, legislation establishing a Firearm Safe Storage Device Grant Fund to be administered by the Alaska Department of Public Safety.

As an Anchorage School Board member, I see every day how deeply our schools are impacted by student mental health challenges. SB 206 represents a practical, nonpartisan, and prevention-focused step that empowers families with tools—not mandates—to help keep children safe.

Secure firearm storage is a proven suicide prevention strategy. Research consistently shows that when firearms are stored locked and unloaded, the risk of youth suicide and accidental injury decreases significantly. SB 206 acknowledges that reality and provides a thoughtful, community-based approach by:

- Creating a grant fund within the Department of Public Safety to provide lockboxes, cable locks, and safes to Alaska's school districts.
- Allowing districts to distribute these devices free of charge to families, with priority given to parents and guardians of at-risk youth.
- Supporting educational outreach on the importance of secure firearm storage.

This bill respects Alaska's strong tradition of responsible firearm ownership while addressing the urgent need to reduce preventable tragedies. It does not stigmatize families or communities. Instead, it equips them.

Schools are often the first to see warning signs when a student is struggling. Giving districts the ability to connect families with tangible safety resources is both compassionate and pragmatic. It aligns with our shared responsibility to protect young people while honoring individual rights.

SB 206 is a commonsense investment in prevention. I commend you both for advancing legislation that prioritizes student safety, supports families, and strengthens partnerships between schools and public safety agencies.

Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to the well-being of Alaska's children.

Sincerely,

Margo Bellamy, Vice President

Anchorage School Board

Dena'inaq ełnen'aq' gheshtnu ch'q'u yeshdu. (Dena'ina)
I live and work on the land of the Dena'ina. (English)

Honorable Chair Dunbar and members of the Senate Health & Social Services Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about SB206, which creates a **firearm safe storage fund** within the Alaska General Fund. **I strongly support this bill.** The fund will allow school districts to offer gun storage education and safe storage devices to Alaskans. It addresses the critical need to fight the following horrifying statistics: firearms are the leading cause of death of Alaskan children and teens - and our state has the third highest rate of gun suicide in the country, more than double the national average. This bill will help us to be vigilantly proactive about protecting against this scourge.

Alaska's 2023-2027 Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan advocates for reducing access to lethal means during times of crisis. Because suicide attempts by firearms lead to death in nine out of ten firearm suicide attempts, a family's careful use of lockboxes, cable locks, and gun safes can thwart the impulse to take one's life with a gun. Providing time between the suicidal thought and the action can make all the difference and that is the intent of this bill.

As our state's '23-'27 Suicide Prevention Plan states, "...properly educating people about safe and responsible gun storage can greatly reduce someone's odds of dying by suicide. Firearms are the most lethal among suicide methods, so it is particularly important that during a crisis they are removed... or they are locked very securely."

I commend Senator Tobin for introducing SB 206 and I urge you to pass it out of your committee. It is a solid first step at reducing Alaska's suicide rate and protecting our precious young people.

Sincerely,

Luann McVey
Retired Alaskan Teacher
Douglas, Alaska 99824

Dear Alaska Legislators:

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 206 which will help educate Alaska's youth about the importance of secure firearm storage that will not only help prevent suicide but will also provide free gun lock devices.

Firearms continue to be the leading means of suicide in Alaska and properly educating people about safe and responsible gun storage can greatly reduce someone's odds of dying by suicide.

Firearms are also the most lethal among suicide methods, so it is particularly important that during a time of crisis they are either removed or locked very securely.

The high school age son of a long-term friend of mine had easy access to guns in his home, and he used one to take his own life. His life needlessly ended and a life-long torment for his parents began.

We have the means to do better and save more lives that are lost when they are going through a vulnerable time. Making access to guns more difficult can slow the process down or stop it, saving lives.

Please support and help pass SB 206.

Thank you,
Sheri Whitethorn (Retired RN)
Anchorage

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 206 and to highlight the critical importance of gun safety education in Alaska.

I come from a multigenerational family of hunters and gun owners. Firearms have always been a part of our lifestyle, and with that came a deep and unwavering commitment to safety. Gun safety education was ingrained in me from the time I can remember. It was not optional in our household. It was foundational. We were taught respect, responsibility, and the understanding that firearm ownership carries serious obligations.

Access to comprehensive firearm safety education is especially critical in Alaska, where we have the highest rate of gun ownership in the country. In a state where firearms are so common, ensuring that individuals of all ages understand proper handling, storage, and responsibility is not just beneficial. It is essential.

My support for this bill is shaped not only by my upbringing, but also by personal experience. I was in first grade when the Columbine school shooting took place in my school district. My teacher's daughter was inside Columbine High School during the shooting, in the cafeteria when Harris and Klebold took the lives of her classmates. The entire district went into lockdown. I will never forget my first grade teacher receiving the news that her child was inside the school during the attack and witnessing her reaction as a parent facing unimaginable fear.

Today, I am also a parent. My son will be entering kindergarten this fall, and I think deeply about the environment he will walk into each day. His safety, and the safety of all Alaska's children, weighs heavily on my mind. While no single policy can prevent every act of violence, we can take meaningful steps to reduce risk. Investing in firearm education and developing clear processes to address access to weapons during times of crisis are responsible measures that respect both constitutional rights and public safety.

Gun ownership and gun safety are not opposing values. In Alaska, they must go hand in hand. SB 206 represents an important step toward strengthening that balance.

I am submitting this testimony as an individual. The views expressed here are my own and do not reflect the views of my employer.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work on behalf of Alaskans.

Emily Leak-Michie

Anchorage, Alaska

Senator Tobin

As a long time supporter of gun safety legislation to prevent as many unnecessary deaths as possible, I strongly support SB 206. This legislation will help educate people about secure gun storage and provide free gun lock devices. I have volunteered to hand out gun locks at various events and people are EAGER & HAPPY to receive their own devices to protect their children and grandchildren from unintended accidents or from sudden suicidal thoughts which may turn quickly into actions. Please protect our Alaskan families, friends, and communities and pass this legislation.

Cheryl Westley
Anchorage, AK 99504

I strongly support SB 206 for the implementation of a firearm storage grant fund for families in schools. This unique distribution system would be an effective way to reduce firearm injuries and deaths in Alaska, particularly suicide deaths.

Alaska's gun death rate and gun suicide rates are among the highest in the nation. Nearly three quarters of Alaska gun deaths are by suicide and over half the suicide deaths are by firearms.

Safe and secure storage of firearms is a key prevention strategy. Among children and youth, gun deaths are nearly twice the number of motor vehicle deaths posing substantial risk.

Almost a quarter of Alaskan high school students have seriously considered suicide, and among those 59% report they could access a loaded gun (2023 YRBS)

Please support this bill to increase secure gun storage and decrease access to loaded firearms especially among youth to prevent suicide and accidental gun injuries and deaths.

Thank you! I am a lifelong Alaskan and mother and grandmother.

Patty Owen
Juneau

Senators,

Thank you for hearing this bill, thank you sponsors Senator Tobin and Senator Gray-Jackson.

Gun rights advocates have nothing to fear from this bill.

The stats are there - youth suicide is off the charts in Alaska.

Establishing a grant to provide school districts gun storage devices and education is the best idea!

Education is the key to so much. And the tools to go with it - safe storage devices would be such a gift to so many struggling families and families that just don't think about safely storing their guns.

The other part of this bill - reporting incidents of bullying and harassment is also incredibly important. Many of our youth suffer with depression and suicide thoughts due to being bullied or marginalized. This needs greater reporting and also more education in the schools and to the parents on addressing it.

Stopping bullying behavior at a young age is critical. Our children should not grow up being afraid. More importantly they should not grow up believing being a bully is the way to be.

A young bully grows up to be a dangerous adult bully.

Please support and pass this bill!

Thanks,

Therese Lewandowski

Dear Senator Tobin;

I am a gun owner and support this legislation, specifically in regards to firearms safety. I am also a victim of gun violence and know first hand the effects of having an unsecured firearm in a home.

In 1969, two weeks before Christmas, my younger brother was killed by his best friend. His friend found his dad's gun, thought it wasn't loaded, and fired it at my brother. My brother was 14 and had been best friends with the shooter since the 2nd grade.

While this happened some time ago, I can tell you for a fact that I can remember every minute of that evening. More than that, I reflect on my brother's death every time I hear of a shooting in the news, which is too often.

Educating people about gun safety and providing resources to help people secure firearms at home is a worthy cause. Alaska has one of the highest gun death rates in the U.S., with approximately 175-182 deaths annually, frequently ranking within the top five states. Roughly 70-74% of these fatalities are suicides, driven by high rates among men, Indigenous populations, and seniors. Guns are the leading cause of death for Alaska children/teens, with ~17-20 annual deaths.

Please do what you can to make our State a safer place to live.

Bill Tremblay
Petersburg, AK 99833

I strongly support SB 206, which will educate families of Alaska's youth about the importance of secure firearm storage to prevent suicide and provide free gun lock devices. Secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides and make those who do attempt more likely to survive. This bill implements Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027 – which calls for reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, during times of crisis.

SB 206 creates a firearm safe storage grant fund within the Alaska General Fund, to be administered by the State. Through school districts, this grant fund will provide secure gun storage education and free safe storage devices (e.g., lockboxes, cable locks, safes) to Alaskan families upon request – with a focus on youth at higher risk of suicide.

In Alaska, firearms are the leading cause of death of children and teens. Alaska has the third highest rate of gun suicide in the US, and has a gun suicide rate more than double the national average.

Alaska's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that among high school students that have seriously considered suicide, 58.6% could access a loaded gun. One in five high school students (22.6%) in Alaska had seriously considered suicide in the past year.

Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027, Goal #3, states: "Firearms continue to be the leading means of suicide in Alaska, and properly educating people about safe and responsible gun storage can greatly reduce someone's odds of dying by suicide. Firearms are the most lethal among suicide methods, so it is particularly important that during a crisis they are removed...or they are locked very securely."

SB 206 will save lives by providing **time** between suicidal thought and action. Suicide attempts using a firearm are almost always lethal—nine out of 10 firearm suicide attempts result in death. Research shows that more than 90% of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide – but if their first attempt is with a gun, they do not usually get the benefit of a second chance at life.

Thank you,
Joclyn Reilly, LCSW
Anchorage AK 99516

Testimony supporting passage of SB 206, relating to reports of harassment, intimidation, or bullying involving students and threats of suicide by students, and establishing the firearm safe storage grant fund

Dear Chair Dunbar and members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee:

Thank you for holding a hearing on SB 206, and taking public testimony on the bill. I urge you to pass it out of committee with a favorable recommendation, and I look forward to the day when its provisions are enacted into law, for it will surely reduce the number of deaths by firearm in Alaska. A terrible price is being paid in terms of lives lost, particularly young people's lives. Firearms are the leading cause of death for Alaska children and teens.

Please enact this measure to educate the public and parents about the importance of secure firearm storage, and reduce deaths by suicide. Alaska has the country's third highest rate of suicide. Alaska has a gun suicide rate of more than twice the national average. It doesn't have to be this way. We can do better. Thank you for considering my testimony. Please include it in the written record of testimony on this measure.

Laura Fleming
Juneau, Alaska

I am writing in STRONG SUPPORT of SB 206. It will save precious lives!!

Sincerely,
Karen Wilson
Juneau

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee,

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 206, which would create a firearm safe storage grant fund to provide secure gun storage information and safe storage devices, like cable locks and lockboxes, to vulnerable youth through school districts.

Firearms are the leading cause of death for Alaskan children and teens, and more than half of the gun deaths for these kids are suicides. Because firearm suicide is uniquely lethal, it is so important that we increase our education efforts and access to secure gun storage to put critical time and space between a person in crisis and a deadly weapon. Often a delay of 10 minutes can save a person's life.

I have been a volunteer with the Be SMART for Kids (besmartforkids.org) program for the past several years, sharing information about secure storage with school districts across Alaska and offering cable locks to families in need. We have met school counselors, school nurses, and administrators from Anchorage to Ketchikan to Kalskag and beyond who have requested educational literature encouraging secure gun storage and cable locks for their students. However, this effort has largely been limited by the small number of volunteers we have to do the work and whether schools are even aware of the secure storage resources that are available to their students. This bill would institutionalize these efforts, providing more equitable access to secure storage education and low-cost devices like cable locks. It falls in line with the Alaska Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan.

If we have the ability to save a young person's life, especially a young person who may be experiencing bullying or harassment at school and considering suicide, we have the responsibility to do so. I applaud Senator Tobin and Senator Gray-Jackson for introducing this bill and encourage you to move it forward.

Thank you,
Rochelle Parker
Anchorage, AK 99502

Dear Members of the Social Services Committee,

In Alaska, where the gun suicide rate is more than double the national average, we have the responsibility to save lives. That is why I strongly support the passage of SB 206.

My three children grew up in Juneau among peers who had many assets: strong family support, caring teachers and bonds with friends with whom they participated in sports and other activities. Yet all three of my kids had classmates who died by firearm suicide. Roughly a fifth of Alaska high school students polled said they had, themselves, seriously considered suicide. This is a red flag!

Access to firearms is a major contributor to suicide deaths. Nine out of 10 firearms suicide attempts are successful. Guns take an impulsive moment and make it permanent.

SB 206 makes Alaskan schools important leaders in the mission to reduce teen suicide deaths. This bill enables school to educate about and provide resources to parents for secure arms storage. The grant fund established by SB 206 will provide firearm safe storage devices such as gun locks or safes at no cost to families. When firearms are unavailable or harder to access, it can make the difference between life and death. A delayed impulse can be a defused impulse. The use of public funds to save vulnerable lives is well worth it. Please vote yes on SB 206.

I appreciate the way Alaska State Senators and Representatives work together regardless of party affiliation for the good of the people. Thank you for the important work you do.

Sincerely,

Diane DeSloover
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Members of the Senate Health & Social Services Committee,

I urge your support for SB 206, and especially section 4 which creates a firearm safe storage grant fund. The fund will do important things to reduce youth suicide, which is tragically high in Alaska. It will enable school districts to educate Alaska families about securing their guns safely plus provide free devices such as lockboxes, cable locks and safes. This bill implements Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027 – which calls for reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, during times of crisis.

Sadly, in Alaska, firearms are the leading cause of death of children and teens. Alaska has the third highest rate of gun suicide in the US, and has a gun suicide rate more than double the national average. Alaska Native/American Indians have the highest gun suicide death rate by race in Alaska.

SB 206 will save lives by providing **time** between suicidal thought and action. Suicide attempts using a firearm are almost always lethal—nine out of 10 firearm suicide attempts result in death.

Thank you for your attention.

Odette Edgar
Juneau, Alaska

Greetings to the Senate Health and Social Services Committee members,

My name is Maria Crawford. My husband and I live in the Fairview neighborhood of Anchorage and we are neighbors with, and constituents of Senator Tobin.

We urge you to support SB 206.

By supporting increased communication and preventative action between students, school staff, and the adults responsible at home for a student's welfare, SB 206 will help save lives, especially the lives of young people who may be at risk for self-harm and experiencing suicidal ideation. We know that easy access to a firearm greatly increases the risk of suicide by firearm. The data in Alaska shows that firearms are the leading cause of death for children and teens, and that Alaska has a gun suicide rate more than double the national average.

SB 206 aligns with Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan by providing grants that school districts can use to educate families about the importance of safe gun storage at home to prevent youth suicide and provide those homes with free firearm lock devices. Knowledge is power, and by educating and empowering families to safely secure their firearms, it will greatly reduce the odds of someone in crisis dying by suicide with a gun. Our communities need legislation like this.

Support SB 206!!!

Thank you for your consideration,

Maria Crawford
(she & her)

I strongly support SB 206, which will educate families of Alaska's youth about the importance of secure firearm storage to prevent suicide and provide free gun lock devices. Secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides and make those who do attempt more likely to survive.

SB 206 creates a firearm safe storage grant fund within the Alaska General Fund, to be administered by the State. Through school districts, this grant fund will provide secure gun storage education and free safe storage devices (e.g., lockboxes, cable locks, safes) to Alaskan families upon request – with a focus on youth at higher risk of suicide.

In Alaska, firearms are the leading cause of death of children and teens. Alaska has the third highest rate of gun suicide in the US, and has a gun suicide rate more than double the national average. Alaska Native/American Indians have the highest gun suicide death rate by race in Alaska.

Alaska's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that among high school students that have seriously considered suicide, 58.6% could access a loaded gun. One in five high school students (22.6%) in Alaska had seriously considered suicide in the past year.

thank you,

Mary Richey Sell

Safe gun storage is essential to decrease teen suicide and other harms done by guns. Many Alaskans are gun owners since many of us hunt and fish to help feed our families. Please support SB 206 which will provide education and easier access to methods for securing firearms safely, helping to keep them out of the hands of kids and anyone who might be experiencing a mental health crisis.

Thank you,

Michele Champion

Hello,

I am writing to voice my support for SB 206, which will educate families of Alaska's youth about the importance of secure firearm storage to prevent suicide and provide free gun lock devices. Secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides and make those who do attempt more likely to survive. Having worked in the field of domestic violence and sexual assault most of my adult life, beginning with a focus on youth engagement, I know well how vital such legislation is to helping reduce violence inside the home, especially with our most vulnerable youth.

Thank you for listening and I sincerely hope you will vote to ensure the success of SB 206.

Thank you,

Morgan Stonecipher

I am writing in favor of SB 206, which I strongly support. The effect of the bill is to educate families of Alaska's youth about the importance of secure firearm storage to prevent suicide, and to provide free gun lock devices. Alaska's tragic record of youth gun deaths needs to be addressed, and this is an effective step in that direction.

As a family impacted both by a fatal gun accident involving two young teens, and by a gun suicide, this measure is important to me. Education about and facilitating secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides, and make those who do attempt more likely to survive. This bill implements Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027 – which calls for reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, during times of crisis.

I thank you in advance for supporting this bill, and taking a positive step in protecting our most important resource: our children and youth.

Cynthia Lagoudakis
Petersburg, AK

Dear Members of the Health and Social Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views on HB206. I strongly urge you to support this bill. It is common sense legislation that serves the people of Alaska especially our youth and those who may become vulnerable with depression. Or accidental deaths because of unlocked firearms storage.

SB 206 creates a firearm safe storage grant fund within the Alaska General Fund, to be administered by the State. Gun suicide is the highest form of suicide in AK and the most lethal. If any of you have experienced a friend, neighbor or family member die from any form of suicide, one often thinks how they wished they had paid more attention, how they wished they had said or done something differently to help the person. I see HB 206 as a tangible, preventative measure that will benefit the entire state by making it more safe.

I encourage you to pass HB 206.

Sincerely,
Laura Stats
Juneau AK

My husband and I urge you to vote for SB 206.

For many years Alaska has had a teen suicide crisis. Our rate of teen suicide is nearly 3 times the national average. Our state has done little that has had any positive impact on these numbers.

Gun access is a key component. Guns are the leading cause of death for children and teens in Alaska, with over half of these deaths being suicides. Anything to do with guns is controversial in our state. SB 206 should be a bill we could all agree on.

My understanding is if you can delay the urge to commit suicide by 5 minutes, the impulse can pass.

(Dr. Gergö Hadlaczky, *The Power of Time*, "creating time—even just a few minutes—can change the trajectory of a suicidal crisis."

SB 206 will educate families of harassed Alaskan youths about the importance of secure firearm storage to prevent suicide and provide free gun lock devices if grant funding is available. (The VA has gun locks that are available for free as does MOM's Demand Action). Secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides. This bill implements Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027 – which calls for reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, during times of crisis.

Thank you for considering our thoughts.

Robin Smith and Eric McCallum
Anchorage, Ak 99505

Dear Senator Tobin,

First, thank you for being a co-sponsor of SB206.

I strongly support SB 206, which will educate families of Alaska's youth about the importance of secure firearm storage to prevent suicide and provide free gun lock devices. Secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides and make those who do attempt more likely to survive. This bill implements Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027 – which calls for reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, during times of crisis. Furthermore, I support any legislation that reduces gun violence in Alaska and the United States. I grew up when active shooter lock-down drills were not something I had to practice in elementary school. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same for my grandson who is in second grade. I look forward to a day when we can send our kids to school without fear of them getting shot in the classroom.

Thank you for helping move us closer to this goal with your support of this bill.

Respectfully,

Jeanne Rynne
Douglas, AK 99824

Dear members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee:

As a public health professional working in Anchorage and a mother of four children, I urge you to support SB 206. It is a proactive approach to protecting at-risk youth from gun suicide. Alaska has too long had the dubious distinction of leading the nation in gun suicides. Especially for Alaska Native communities this provision for safe gun storage options means lives can be saved and communities can be spared the tragic loss that comes with suicide.

I hope you can also see the public health merits of this legislation.

Sincerely,
Annette Marley, MPH

Hello,

I have lived in Sitka since 1982. My two daughters were born and raised here and now my two granddaughters are as well. We own guns, relying on venison for our primary meat source. **I strongly support SB 206, creating a firearm safe storage grant fund within the Alaska General Fund.** Secure gun storage education and free safe storage devices are the very least we can do to reduce the risk of youth suicide – an epidemic in Alaska. Firearms are the leading cause of death of children and teens in our state. Alaska has the third highest rate of gun suicide in the US more than double the national average! Alaska Native/American Indians have the highest gun suicide death rate by race in Alaska.

Alaska's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that among high school students that have seriously considered suicide, nearly 60% could access a loaded gun. One in five high school students in Alaska had seriously considered suicide in the past year. As legislators an important part of your job is ensuring public safety. This bill implements Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027 – which calls for reducing access to lethal means, including firearms, during times of crisis. Secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides and make those who do attempt more likely to survive.

Every Alaskan I know has been touched by a youth who has killed themselves with a gun. Sitka lost a wonderful young man just a few years ago. This continues to be a devastating loss to his family, friends, and our community. I stop at his memorial every day when I walk on the cross trail. SB 206 will save lives by providing invaluable time between suicidal thought and action. Suicide attempts using a firearm are almost always lethal—nine out of 10 firearm suicide attempts result in death. It is heartbreaking to think this young man would still be with his family if he had not had ready access to his father's gun. Research shows that more than 90% of people who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide – but if their first attempt is with a gun, they do not usually get the benefit of a second chance at life.

Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027, Goal #3, states: "Firearms continue to be the leading means of suicide in Alaska, and properly educating people about safe and responsible gun storage can greatly reduce someone's odds of dying by suicide. Firearms are the most lethal among suicide methods, so it is particularly important that during a crisis they are removed...or they are locked very securely."

You have the power with your vote to impact the outcome for many of our youth. Please support SB206.

Thank you,

Tory O'Connell Curran
Sitka, Alaska

I support this bill. My closest friend's son was shot and killed by another teen at age 15. She will never recover fully from this completely avoidable tragedy.

Gun owners must be held responsible for safe storage or risk contributing to illegitimate gun violence.

Dr Emily Kane
Juneau AK 99801

Mr. Chair and members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee,

I strongly support SB 206, which will empower school districts to provide free gun lock devices (lock boxes, cable locks, safes) and education about the important of safe gun storage to families. Secure gun storage in the home will reduce the number of youth suicides in Alaska and make those who do attempt more likely to survive.

Our state public health data shows that the risk of suicide by gun is high for Alaska's youth. Guns are the leading cause of death of Alaska's children and teens. Alaska has the third highest rate of gun suicide in the US – a rate more than double the national average. Alaska's 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that one in five high school students (22.6%) in Alaska had seriously considered suicide in the past year. Among these students, 58.6% said they could access a loaded gun.

As Senator Tobin emphasized in her presentation to this committee on February 10, this bill will save lives by providing **time** between suicidal thought and action. Suicide attempts using a gun are fatal nine times out of 10. Research shows that more than 90% of people who survive a first suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide in the future. But, if their first attempt is with a gun, they do not usually get the benefit of that second chance at life.

Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan for 2023-2027 prioritizes reducing access to lethal means, including guns, during times of crisis. Goal #3 of the plan emphasizes: "Firearms continue to be the leading means of suicide in Alaska, and properly educating people about safe and responsible gun storage can greatly reduce someone's odds of dying by suicide. Firearms are the most lethal among suicide methods, so it is particularly important that during a crisis they are removed...or they are locked very securely."

I urge this Committee to listen to Alaska's Statewide Suicide Prevention Council -- and to the Alaska Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, that supports this bill – and pass SB 206.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments,

Jan Caulfield

Juneau, AK 99801