

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

REPRESENTATIVE ADAM WOOL

Session: January – April
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HB 203 Sponsor Statement **Alaska Secure Storage of Firearms**

Firearms hold significant social and cultural importance to Alaskans. Across the state, 64.5% of residents report owning guns, ranking Alaska third among all states in per capita firearm ownership. Whether for personal protection, subsistence, or recreational hunting, the value that Alaskans place on keeping and utilizing firearms is substantial. Furthermore, most gun owners across the country report putting a high value on responsible ownership. For example, 95% of gun owners say it is essential to talk to their children about gun safety, and 66% of gun owners believe it is essential for their firearms to be kept in a locked place when there are minors in the home. HB 203 promotes secure storage of firearms in order to protect children and teens while preserving a lifestyle held dear by many Alaskans.

Despite a large percentage of Alaskans reporting gun ownership and declaring a desire for gun safety, our state has notably high rates of firearm-related injury and death. Alaska's firearm death rate is the second-highest in the nation and nearly double the national average (23 per 100,000 compared to 12 in the U.S generally). Guns are also the leading cause of death for children and teens in Alaska. An average of 22 children per year are killed due to firearm-related mortality, and 59% of these deaths are gun suicides. In 2019, nearly half of high school students (48.9%) reported that they could easily access a loaded gun, and a further one-fourth of high school students across the state (25.3%) reported seriously considering suicide within the past year. Overall, firearm suicide in Alaska is more than double the national average, with 68% of Alaska's gun deaths caused by suicide. Securely storing firearms has been shown to combat these startling figures, and to reduce both self-inflicted and unintentional firearm morbidity and mortality. Additionally, secure storage is affordable and easily implemented, while still offering firearm owners with quick and easy access to guns for their personal and property protection needs.

HB 203 will incentivize secure storage of firearms by creating a violation for improperly storing firearms so they cannot be accessed by anyone not authorized to use them, including children. This bill adds weight to the responsibility that should be paramount to gun owners to keep kids safe. HB 203 does not impose invasive measures on the public. Practically speaking, this bill implements a retroactive fine in the event that guns are not securely stored by an adult firearm owner and lead to improper use by anyone prohibited from owning a firearm. If a minor child or prohibited person accesses a firearm because it wasn't securely stored and causes injury, the firearm owner can face a criminal penalty and a fine.

Please join me in supporting House Bill 203 to promote responsible and safe gun ownership through secure storage of firearms in Alaska.

My staff on this legislation is Ashley Carrick. She can be reached at 907-465-6959 or at ashley.carrick@akleg.gov.