



March 10, 2022

Representative Adam Wool
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for House Bill 203 – Safe Gun Storage

Representative Wool,

The Alaska Children's Trust (ACT) extends our support for House Bill 203, "an act establishing the offense of the misconduct involving weapons in the sixth degree." Alaska Children's Trust is the statewide lead organization working to prevent child abuse and neglect across the state through systems change. We believe incentivizing secure firearm storage adds a protective layer for children, youth, and families against firearm-related deaths and injury.

On average, Alaska has the second-highest rate of firearm deaths in the nation at 23.4 deaths per 100,000 people, nearly double the national average (CDC, 2016-2020). Of these firearm-related deaths, 68% are from suicide. For over a decade, suicide has been a top-ten leading cause of death for Alaskans. In addition to the emotional toll, firearm injuries and fatalities have immense medical, economic, and social costs to the state of Alaska, with 2010 cost estimates averaging \$1.3 million per suicide-related death (Suicide Prevention Resource Center). These costs deeply impact the health and well-being of Alaskan families for a lifetime.

Alaskan children and youth are particularly at increased risk of injury or death from a firearm. On average from 2016-2020, guns served as the leading cause of death of Alaskans aged 0-19, and of those deaths, an average of 59% resulted from suicide. Alaska's adolescent suicide rate has long been among the highest in the country, tripling the national average during 2016-2018. Now, initial 2020 data shows that suicide attempts among 11-to-14-year-olds have increased.

In just over a decade, the rise in suicidal ideation among Alaska high school students has also been alarming, with planning rates up 33% for male students and nearly 70% for female students. In 2019, over 25% Alaska's high school students self-reported planning a suicide attempt in the previous 12 months. In that same survey, nearly 49% reported easy access to a

loaded firearm. While it is unclear how the COVID-19 pandemic will ultimately impact these youth mental health numbers, initial reports indicate we must take every step possible to ensure the survival of our children through these trying times.

House Bill 203 is a practical, non-invasive approach to responsible firearm storage and safety. Research suggests that access to firearms is a major risk factor for suicide attempts and decreases the odds of surviving such an attempt. While this bill cannot single-handedly solve our state's suicide and injury rates, responsible firearm storage can add an achievable layer of protection for Alaska's young people.

We thank you for sponsoring House Bill 203 and urge the Legislature's support of this protective measure for Alaska's children, youth, and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'TJS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Trevor J. Storrs
President & CEO