

State Affairs Committee
Alaska House of Representatives
State Capitol Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801

The Honorable Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins, Chair
The Honorable Matt Claman, Vice Chair

February 24, 2022

Dear Representative Kreiss-Tomkins, Representative Claman, and Members of the Committee,

We write to you as representatives of the religious communities of Alaska. As you consider legislation under review to address public safety and reduce gun violence, we wish to express our support for measures requiring the secure storage of firearms and ammunition.

Alaska has the highest rate of gun deaths in the United States, a tragic statistic that includes one of the highest rates of unintentional shootings by children and the third highest rate of firearm suicide. Securely storing firearms using locked containers or inexpensive trigger or cable locks could significantly reduce these numbers in a cost-effective and meaningful manner.

While it is true that guns are an essential part of life for many Alaskans, especially those Alaskans who hunt to feed their families, it is not necessary that guns be stored carelessly or irresponsibly. We must prioritize keeping our children safe, both at home and at school. Why take the chance of having a child unintentionally shoot themselves or others at school — especially when we know that it can be prevented?

Every year, 174 people die by guns across Alaska, and two-thirds of these incidents are firearm suicides. While secure storage will not prevent every single one of these deaths, it will make it much easier for families to protect those who are struggling with suicidal thoughts.

Religious institutions across Alaska are helping lead the efforts to end gun violence. We are the ones who bury the dead; who pray with, console, and counsel families. We are the ones who help shattered communities try and put the pieces of their lives back together after incidents of violence. So many of these tragedies are preventable. Alaska has the second-highest rate of deaths and injuries resulting from a child unintentionally shooting themselves or others. The physical and psychological trauma is

long-lasting, affecting the victims and their families, the child who accessed the gun and their family, and the extended communities of both.

Collectively, we know the human toll these tragedies have had in our communities. For this reason, we urge the Alaska Legislature to pass secure storage legislation in the 2022 session. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Student Rabbi Max Antman
Congregation Sukkat Shalom
Juneau, AK

Rev. Sean Avery
Joy Lutheran Church
Eagle River, AK

Libby Bakalar, Board Co-Chair
Juneau Jewish Community, Congregation Sukkat Shalom
Juneau, AK

Pastor Erika Bergh
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Anchorage, AK

Rev. Gordon Blue
The Church of the Holy Trinity (Episcopal)
Juneau, AK

Rev. David A. Boling
Anchorage First Christian Church
Anchorage, AK

Rev. Paul L. Boling
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Anchorage, AK

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Raissa D'Antonio
President, Friends in Serving Humanity
Anchorage, AK

Pastor Jim Doepken
United Methodist Church of Chugiak
Chugiak, AK

Rev. Betty M. Glover
Episcopal Priest, Diocese of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK

Rev. Meredith Harber
Christ Lutheran Church
Soldotna, AK

Rev. Ellen Johnson-Price
Immanuel Presbyterian Church
Anchorage, AK

Rev. Caroline F. Malseed
St. Brendan's Episcopal Church
Juneau, AK

Rev. Faith McClellan
Northern Light United Church
Juneau, AK

Rev. Belle Mickelson
St. George's Episcopal Church
Cordova, AK

Rev. Jacob Poindexter
First Congregational Church of Anchorage
Anchorage, AK

(continued)

Rev. Nico Reijns
United Methodist Church
Girdwood, AK

Rev. Aaron Silco
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Shishmaref, AK

Rev. Anna Silco
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Shishmaref, AK

Jetta Whittaker, Board Chair
Juneau Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Juneau, AK

Bishop Shelley Wickstrom
Alaska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Anchorage, AK