

H.R. 4926

The Prevent Family Fire Act of 2019



Introduced by Representatives Mike Levin (D-CA), Rodney Davis (R-IL), Brendan Boyle (D-PA), Elise Stefanik (R-NY), Kim Schrier (D-WA), and Mike Turner (R-OH).

Every day, eight children and teens are unintentionally shot by an unsecured firearm and nearly 60 Americans will die by suicide with a gun – devastating incidents of Family Fire.¹

Family Fire is a shooting involving an improperly stored or misused gun found in the home that results in death or injury, including unintentional shootings, suicides, and intentional shootings. Derived from the military term “friendly fire,” it is one of the most preventable contributors to injury-related deaths in the country.

SAFE STORAGE PREVENTS FAMILY FIRE

Today, an estimated 4.6 million minors, approximately 7% of all U.S. children, live in homes with at least one firearm that is both loaded and unlocked.² Children are naturally curious – more than 75% of first and second graders know where their parents keep their firearms,³ and 36% of children ages 5 to 14 admitted to having handled a gun without their parents’ knowledge.⁴ More than 80% of guns used by youth in suicide attempts were kept in the home of the victim, a relative, or a friend,⁵ and about 80% of school shootings perpetrated by a minor are facilitated by kids and teens having access to unsecured and/or unsupervised guns.⁶

Securing firearms provides a barrier to lethal means when a person is contemplating suicide, giving them crucial moments to reconsider that decision or for family and friends to intervene. Only 6% of suicide attempts involve a firearm, but they account for more than 50% of all suicide deaths.⁷ Attempted suicide by gun results in death 85% of the time, compared to just 3% for other common methods.⁸ A second chance is critical because the vast majority—a full 70%—will never make another attempt on their life.⁹ This is especially important for the veteran community, who are already 150% more likely to die by suicide.¹⁰ About 20 veterans die by suicide in the U.S. every day;¹¹ approximately two-thirds of them use a gun.¹²

Teaching children about gun safety is vital and should be reinforced often. Similarly, checking in with friends and family who might be in crisis is an critically important way to protect against suicide, but the most effective way to prevent tragedies in the home is to practice safe firearms storage. Keeping guns safely stored and separated from ammunition can reduce the chances of Family Fire by over 70%.¹³

SAFE STORAGE PREVENTS GUN THEFTS

In addition to the benefits of averting Family Fire, the proper storage of firearms can have a tremendous effect on preventing other forms of gun violence. Gun thefts from cars, homes, and gun dealers are a major source of black-market gun sales,¹⁴ and the great majority of stolen firearms are taken from everyday gun owners.¹⁵ According to National Crime Information Center data at least 2 million firearms were reported stolen between 2008 and 2017,¹⁶ though a recent study suggests the number of stolen guns could be much higher due to underreporting – upwards of 380,000 annually.¹⁷

Stolen firearms have enormous consequences for communities across the country. Between 2010 and 2016, police recovered more than 23,000 stolen firearms, the vast majority of which were connected with crimes such as kidnappings, armed robberies, sexual assaults, murders, and other violent acts.¹⁸ Higher levels of neighborhood gun violence drive depopulation, discourage commercial activity, and decrease property values, resulting in fewer business establishments, fewer jobs, lower home values, and lower home ownership rates,¹⁹ all of which contribute to the \$229 billion annual cost of gun violence in America.²⁰

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According to a study released in 2019, even a modest intervention that motivates firearm owners to safely store guns could reduce youth firearm deaths by up to 32%.²¹ Additionally, research has shown that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for safe storage, and that gun owners have varying preferences to fit their needs.²² Most importantly, gun owners who had at least one unlocked firearm in the home were substantially more likely – between 70% and 84% – to practice proper storage if they owned a safe storage device, depending on the type of device offered.²³

The Prevent Family Fire Act of 2019 embraces a market approach to increasing safe firearm storage by incentivizing retail sales through tax credits. It provides a tax credit for retail sales of safe storage devices that are designed and marketed to deny unauthorized access to, or render inoperable, a firearm or ammunition, and secured by a combination, key, or biometric lock. This credit is equal to 10% of cost at sale, with a maximum credit of \$40 per device sold, applicable to devices sold domestically.

Retailers, motivated by their bottom line, are incentivized to allocate more resources to marketing and selling safe storage devices. Given increased profit margins, businesses have multiple avenues to maximize this credit. Retailers could offer safety devices at a discount to sell more units, train their workforces to offer safety devices during each sale, or devote premium floor or website space to market safety devices. By focusing

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on a percentage credit on the retail price, as opposed to an item credit for each unit, retailers are incentivized to maintain a broader stock and to emphasize the most secure and reliable products.

This bipartisan legislation will increase the number of firearm safety devices sold to consumers by incentivizing those who have the highest likelihood of motivating gun owners to safely store their firearms – retailers that consumers consult and trust most for their firearms needs.

While the human costs associated with Family Fire are incalculable, it is also an immense financial drain on American taxpayers. A modest investment that modifies market strategies for retailers could pay enormous dividends to families across the United States and save precious lives.

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