

Date: March 22, 2023
Bill Number: HB2304
Indicate Disposition: Opponent
Name of Conferee: Colleen Cunningham
Self

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Colleen Cunningham. I am a former teacher of kids with emotional and behavioral disorders and a mom of 3 young kids. I am writing in opposition to HB2304.

Through my teaching experience, my volunteer work, as well as my parenting, I have seen firsthand the traumatizing effects of gun violence in our communities, even when firearms aren't physically present. Like all of our public school students, my oldest began practicing regular "lockdown, lights out" drills as a kindergartener. Within just a couple of months, she had not only learned how to hide in the corners of her classroom away from windows, but she learned that guns are dangerous and can be present anywhere. What resulted was a kid who would open the doors of our van just a crack to exit the car when we ran errands to the grocery store, who would hide behind me for the length of that errand, and who would outright panic when we encountered a police officer who had a firearm. I want you to understand that we are traumatizing our kids by bringing firearms and discussion of firearms into our schools, and that some kids—including some of my former students—are coming to school already traumatized by the gun violence they see and hear in their homes and communities. For those students in particular, bringing discussion of firearms into what is supposed to be a safe place could very well trigger a PTSD or other strong trauma response.

I understand the intent behind this legislation, and agree that gun safety is necessary to stem the numbers of children who are unintentionally injured or killed with a firearm, as well as to curb suicides and school shootings. However, **research tells us that programs like Eddie Eagle, and indeed the Eddie Eagle program itself, are not effective** at teaching kids how to perform gun safety skills (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14702451/>; <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11389238/>; <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15342889/>). Besides being ineffective, providing this education in our public schools will further traumatize many of our students.

While I absolutely agree that we need to take legislative action to help prevent unintentional shootings and deaths of our Kansas children, we know that mandating safe storage would have a larger positive impact to that end. Research tells us that locking both firearms and ammunition are associated with an 85% lower risk of unintentional firearm injuries among children, as well as decreasing incidents of suicide and school shootings. That is where our legislative focus should be. Gun safety education programs are not an adequate substitute and can cause further trauma, and as such, I ask that you oppose HB2304.

Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.

Colleen Cunningham
Overland Park