

Jared Avilez

Kansas Resident

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The Honorable Tom Kessler (Chair)

Kansas State Legislature

Committee on Federal and State Affairs

State Capitol

Topeka, Kansas 66612

To the Kansas Legislators of the Committee on Federal and State Affairs,

My name is Jared Avilez, and I am a Kansas resident writing as a private citizen in support of HB 2501 and the expansion of The Armory Project (TAP) voluntary firearm storage program. I also work in prevention and community education focused on mental health and suicide prevention. I am a concealed carry permit holder in both Kansas and Oklahoma, a longtime hunter, and someone who deeply values responsible firearm ownership, safety, and conservation.

Firearm safety is a well-established and ongoing conversation within the gun-owning community. We regularly talk about safe handling, proper storage, and training. What is often missing from that conversation is how to be safe with our mental health during times of stress or crisis. For some gun owners, perceived stigma or fear of long-term consequences can make it difficult to open up or seek help during those moments. Voluntary, out-of-home firearm storage provides a practical option that aligns with gun culture by meeting people where they are, offering support through trusted messengers, and preserving dignity and choice.

I have seen firsthand how critical this can be. A close family member experienced a significant personal crisis involving job loss, family stress, and alcohol use. During that time, I knew it was important to create distance between him and his firearms while he recovered. While we were able to secure his firearms temporarily, the options available to us were limited, and I never felt fully confident in that plan. Had a program like TAP been available and widely supported, my family would have strongly encouraged its use and felt far more at ease knowing there was a trusted, lawful, and community-based option in place.

I also come from a family with a strong military background. While I am not a veteran myself, many of my family members have served across multiple branches. One of my older brothers served as an Air Force Tactical Air Control Party (TACP) operator, and I have witnessed the mental health challenges that can follow military service and disrupt even the strongest individuals and families. TAP's origins matter to me because the program itself was developed by a veteran and firearm retailer in response to a fellow veteran's crisis. Programs built by

people with lived experience often resonate more deeply and function more effectively within the communities they are designed to serve.

Through my work in community mental health education, I see firsthand the shortage of mental health professionals and the barriers many people face when trying to access timely support. This challenge is especially pronounced in rural parts of Kansas. Because of this reality, trusted community gatekeepers play an essential role in prevention. Firearm retailers are already serving in this role by having difficult conversations, pausing transactions when something feels off, and prioritizing safety. Programs like The Armory Project build on that responsibility by giving gun shops a lawful and practical way to support individuals and families during critical moments.

Voluntary firearm storage is one of the few practical tools that allows time and distance during a temporary crisis while remaining lawful, voluntary, and community-based. Research consistently shows that increasing time and distance from lethal means during periods of acute distress can significantly reduce suicide risk. Firearms remain the most lethal method of suicide, which makes responsible, temporary storage options an essential component of prevention efforts.

HB 2501 addresses a key barrier to expanding this work by providing reasonable civil liability protections for participating Federal Firearms Licensees. These protections are not about avoiding accountability; they are about ensuring that responsible businesses and individuals are not discouraged from helping due to legal uncertainty. By supporting HB 2501, the Legislature can encourage responsible participation, strengthen community-based prevention, and help reduce preventable tragedies across Kansas.

I respectfully ask for your support of HB 2501 and for policies that empower Kansans to help one another safely, responsibly, and with compassion during times of crisis.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Jared Avilez