

Safe Firearm Storage

The Issue

Over 600 children die by gun suicide each year, most often using guns belonging to a family member. Nearly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else each year. Additionally, between 70% and 90% of the guns used in school shootings perpetrated by shooters under the age of 18 were acquired from their home or the home of a relative or friend.

Firearms are the leading cause of death among children and teens in Illinois. In Illinois, an average of 183 children and teens die by gunfire every year, and 82% of these deaths are homicides. In the United States, 58% of all gun deaths among children and teens are homicides.

Nearly a quarter of all gun owners report storing all their guns in an unlocked location in the home. Approximately 4.6 million minors live in homes with loaded, unlocked firearms. Research indicates that strong child access prevention laws decrease unintentional shootings, suicides, and school shootings. States with laws that hold gun owners accountable when children access unsecured guns saw an 8% decrease in overall suicide rates and an 11% decrease in firearm suicide rates among adolescents aged 14 to 17.

Illinois PTA Position

As early as 1999, the members of the Illinois PTA recognized that unsecured firearms represented a growing threat to our children and youth. At that time, the call for more stringent child access prevention laws became an on-going position.

The Legislation Platform of the Illinois PTA, Item 4g, calls for strengthening and enforcing existing legislation to control sales, distribution, and possession of firearms, as well as the sale of handgun ammunition. Our platform further explains the necessity for legislation providing increased safety measures such as trigger locks or requiring parents to keep firearms securely stored.

At the 2021 Illinois PTA Convention, a resolution on safe gun storage was adopted by the delegates. Since adoption, Illinois PTA has advocated with the General Assembly to pass legislation related to safe gun storage. One bill passed into law ([PA 102-0971](#)) directs school districts to include instruction on safe gun storage in any class discussing safety in the home. The second bill ([PA 102-1067](#)) directs the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) to conduct a two-year safe gun storage education campaign that includes a gun lock and gun safe distribution campaign and gun buy-back programs. The campaign must also focus on suicide prevention, youth or young adult survivors of gun violence, and families at risk due to domestic violence. IDPH must report the results of the campaign to the legislature. Illinois PTA continues to advocate for legislation requiring all gun owners to safely store their firearms.

One of the resolved clauses in the resolution called for Illinois PTA to submit the resolution to National PTA. In 2023, Illinois PTA worked with Michigan PTA, who submitted a similar resolution on safe firearms storage, to produce a joint resolution on the issue. That resolution was adopted by the 2023 National PTA Convention delegates.