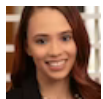


# Safe Storage Saves Lives



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## Key Takeaways

Every year, hundreds of young lives are inadvertently cut short by firearms that were left unsecured by their owners. These preventable tragedies lie at the heart of our nation's debate over safe and responsible gun ownership. At the very least, those privileged with the ability to exercise their Second Amendment rights should take the basic, yet profoundly necessary, precautions to ensure those lethal tools do not end up in the wrong hands. Nearly five million children under the age of 18 live in homes with unsecured firearms, posing a significant risk to their friends, their family, and themselves. Safe storage laws have been proven to prevent both accidental and intentional loss of life, which is why legislation to that effect is absolutely crucial at the federal and state level.

# Safe Storage Laws in America

Safe storage laws are regulations that require firearms and ammunition to be securely stored in a manner that reduces access to the weapons by unauthorized users. When stored properly, guns have less of a chance of getting into the hands of minors, thieves, mentally ill people, and those individuals who are legally unable to possess firearms. Eight out of ten Americans support requiring the safe storage of firearms, including two-thirds of lawful gun owners.<sup>1</sup> Proper and effective safe storage can be achieved by several methods, most of which do not impose any financial or physical burden on an individual's ability to easily access and make use of their own firearms. Safe storage methods include lockboxes for handguns and ammo, gun safes for rifles, and trigger locks that are small and inexpensive, yet highly effective.<sup>2</sup> There are even "smart guns" available that incorporate innovative technology to ensure that only authorized users are able to pull the trigger.<sup>3</sup>

Safe storage laws have been enacted in eleven U.S. states, with some states imposing more stringent requirements than others.<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts is currently the only state that requires nearly all firearms to be stored with a lock.<sup>5</sup> Some cities go one step further than the state regulations, requiring more stringent storage practices within their borders. For example, New York City requires all lawful handgun owners to lock their weapon whenever it is out of their immediate possession or control.<sup>6</sup> Similar to safe storage requirements, Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws have been implemented in 27 states and are targeted at limiting a minor's access to firearms stored in the home. These regulations range in severity from imposing criminal liability if a minor is likely to gain access to an unsecure gun, to parents and guardians only being held accountable if they directly provide a gun to a minor.<sup>7</sup>

There is currently no federal law requiring the safe storage of firearms. The Department of Justice has issued federal regulations that require federally licensed firearm manufacturers, importers, and retailers to make appropriate storage equipment available for every gun they sell.<sup>8</sup> Those regulations, however, do not extend to private sellers and do not require actual use of the storage device. Federal legislation is needed to protect every citizen from dangerous weapons falling into the wrong hands.

## How Safe Storage Can Save Lives

In 2021, there were 369 unintentional shootings by children with access to a firearm that was not secured safely, resulting in 142 deaths.<sup>9</sup> The victims of these shootings include mothers, fathers, siblings, and best friends of the child that pulled the trigger. These unintentional shootings have a tragic lasting impact on the children involved and their families. The secure storage of firearms could have prevented these tragedies in nearly every case.

The safe storage of firearms does not only protect lives inside the home but in public as well. A stunning 80% of all school shootings since 1999 were committed as a result of a minor gaining access to an unsecure firearm in their own home or that of a friend or relative.<sup>10</sup> Safe storage also

prevents thieves from getting their hands on dangerous weapons that can be used in subsequent crimes. As many as 400,000 firearms are stolen from their owners every year, only 11.6% of which are later recovered by law enforcement.<sup>11</sup> The majority of these stolen guns eventually turn up at kidnapping, robbery, and homicide crime scenes across the country. Gun owners who own a large number of guns and do not safely store their firearms are most susceptible to theft.<sup>12</sup>

The safe storage of firearms not only prevents unauthorized users from causing harm to others but can also save them from harming themselves. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among young Americans 10–34 years old. Half of all suicides are committed with a firearm.<sup>13</sup> Guns that are left unsecured can be easily accessed by individuals who are vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. The lethal nature of the weapon itself poses an elevated danger to minors and young adults battling mental illness and instability. The proper safe storage of firearms can help eliminate the risk of deadly impulse a loved one can experience in their darkest hour.

## **Ethan’s Law – H.R. 478**

H.R. 748 was introduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress by Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut’s 3<sup>rd</sup> district, and currently has the support of 208 cosponsors in the House of Representatives.<sup>14</sup> The legislation is titled “Ethan’s Law”, in memory of Ethan Song of Guilford, Connecticut, who accidentally shot and killed himself at a friend’s house while playing with an unsecured handgun owned by his friend’s father.<sup>15</sup>

The bill would require all firearms that have moved through interstate commerce to be safely stored with an appropriate device if the owner knows or reasonably should know that a minor or individual legally unable to possess a firearm would be likely to gain access to it.<sup>16</sup> The law imposes a \$500 penalty for each violation, with an enhanced penalty of jail time if a minor causes an injury or death with an unsecured firearm. The legislation also implements a safe storage grant program that allocates federal funds to states adopting similar laws at the state level to be used to facilitate the execution of those laws.

Nearly every Democratic member of the House of Representatives supports Ethan’s Law. There is an identical bill in the Senate introduced by Senator Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, which has the support of five Democratic cosponsors.

## **Conclusion**

Our Constitution guarantees the right for law abiding Americans to keep and bear arms. It does not, however, discharge the responsibility for gun owners to keep their weapons out of the hands of those who can cause inadvertent or intentional harm. The rapid influx of gun violence in America is tearing families and communities apart. Vigilant gun owners must do their part to neutralize the danger of unsecured firearms claiming the lives of innocent Americans. The first step in that endeavor is for Congress to pass Ethan’s Law.

## TOPICS

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