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Providing Free Gun Locks at Los Angeles County Hospitals

Gun violence continues to be a public health crisis across the United States, and children too often fall victim. In 2020, gunshot wounds became the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in the United States. In California, where we have more robust gun regulations, gun violence is the third leading cause of death for youth. Black children are disproportionately impacted by gun violence across the United States: in California, 41% of black teenage boys died due to gun violence. There was a spike of gun assaults against children during the COVID-19 pandemic, and firearm injuries and deaths among youth peaked in 2021. That same year, suicide deaths by firearm accounted for almost half of all suicides among children and adolescents.

The threat of gunshots sometimes comes from within the house, especially for suicides and accidental discharges. In July of this year, a three-year-old got ahold of an unsecured gun in their house in Fallbrook California, and accidentally shot and killed their one-year-old sister. This incident highlights a concerning reality: even with safe storage laws in California, which mandate firearms to be locked and secured in homes where a child under 18 is likely to gain access, some families fail to securely store their guns. The

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American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines recommend that any guns that remain in a home should be kept (1) locked, (2) unloaded, and (3) with ammunition secured separately. Following these guidelines can decrease the risk of suicide or accidental injury by nearly 80%.

Unfortunately, according to the Pew Research Center, 64% of US gun owners fail to keep their guns in a locked place and 56% of US gun owners keep their guns loaded. This increases the risk of injury or death within a house, especially for children and teens. Securely storing firearms with gun safety cable locks or within a gun safe or lock box is one way to prevent firearms from being accessed or used by children.

Safe storage of firearms has been proven to reduce rates of unintentional shootings by children. The unintentional child shooting rate is 78% lower in states that require secure storage when a gun is not in the owner's possession compared to states with no secure storage laws. Safe storage of a gun is defined in California as using a Department of Justice-approved firearm safety device that safely locks and secures guns. A firearm safety device, such as a gun lock, is a locking device that can be installed on the firearms directly and is designed to prevent children and unauthorized users from firing a firearm. While it is state law to lock guns in a house that has children, adults without children in their house would also benefit from utilizing gun locks and safe storage so that only authorized users would be able to use the gun.

Gun locks and safe storage are important harm-reduction strategies when there is a gun in the house. Los Angeles County has committed to preventing gun violence in our communities by implementing comprehensive gun violence prevention measures. One way to reduce gun violence is to encourage the use of gun locks and safe storage. Some hospitals around the country have begun providing free gun locks in their facilities because research suggests that parents who are gun owners are more likely to improve

safe storage practices when a storage device is provided to them during a doctor's visit. These small, handheld locks, which are stored in containers at hospitals, can be taken home after a doctor's visit and used to secure guns in the house. Los Angeles County should also consider providing gun locks at our County hospitals as a harm reduction strategy.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Health - Office of Violence Prevention, in coordination with the Department of Health Services, to explore placing gun locks free of charge for the public at Los Angeles County hospitals, and report back to the Board in writing in 45 days. The report should include:

- 1) The number of hospitals and the number of locks required for implementation;
- 2) A proposed process and plan for implementation that includes a timeline to secure the locks, development of educational campaigns, and identification of a distribution strategy; and
- 3) Any resources required to purchase and provide gun safety cable locks, gun safes, and/or lock boxes.

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