

## TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION OF HCR 5020

January 23, 2024

Chair Carpenter, Vice Chair Kessler, Ranking Member Hoye and Members of the House Federal & State Affairs Committee,

The Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (KAAP) represents more than 400 of the practicing pediatricians in the state. The KAAP has the fundamental goal that all children and adolescents in Kansas may grow safe and strong. It is with this goal in mind that we share our strong opposition to the proposed HCR 5020 to amend section 4 of the Kansas Bill of Rights. The proposed amendment would allow uncontrolled possession and use of ammunition, firearm accessories and firearm components. Firearms are a leading cause of death for children through homicide, suicide, and unintentional injury. HCR 5020 would hinder common sense gun violence prevention strategy to keep our children safe.

Pediatricians are particularly concerned about unintended consequences of HCR 5020 on our pediatric population. Nationally, firearms are the leading cause of death in children and youth, up to age 24. The [Child Death Review](#) team in Kansas reported that while the overall death rate for children and teens has decreased, the state has experienced increases in its suicide rate and gun-related deaths.

Kansas is facing a youth suicide crisis, as suicide is the second leading cause of death for Kansans ages 15-24. Of the common methods for attempting suicide, firearms are the most lethal with a mortality rate of about 90%. Studies have shown that firearm availability plays a key role in increasing the risk of suicide among adolescents, especially if a loaded gun is in the home.

Children can also be casualties of domestic violence homicides when a gun is involved. Research published in [Pediatrics](#) (December 2023) revealed around 20% of homicides of children aged 2 to 14 years involved intimate partner violence. Furthermore, most of these child homicide victims were killed with a firearm.


Recent mass shootings have prompted school districts everywhere to conduct school shooter drills, at all ages – even kindergartners. Most firearms obtained by adolescent school shooters came from family, relatives, friends, or acquaintances: 42% from relatives, mostly through theft, and 22% from friends.


For some youth, violence is a daily experience. This ongoing traumatization may seriously disrupt a child’s development and cause damage that is more complicated than that from a single traumatic event. These include increased depression, substance

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abuse, other risky behaviors, homelessness, and poor school performance. Being victimized by crime as a child or during the transitional period to adolescence also increases the odds of them becoming perpetrators of crimes.

If the constitutional amendment became law, there would be little or no way to address all these needs and issues. HCR 5020 would hinder common sense gun violence prevention strategies to keep our children, families, and communities safe. Our concerns include:

- Rising gun violence statistics.
- Firearms are the leading cause of death among children in Kansas.
- Firearms are the most lethal means of suicide.
- Domestic abusers would have access to firearms and the abuse recipient and family would have no protection.
- Threat assessment programs would be less likely to address school-based issues, while the trauma of gun violence would continue to impact children's development.

Help us keep Kansas children safe by opposing HCR 5020. Thank you for your time and consideration. We remain available as a resource and partner for all matters affecting children's health and wellbeing.

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair, Public Policy Committee