

## Child Fatality Task Force



## Child Fatality Task Force Recommendation

Support recurring funding of \$2.26 million to sustain the NC S.A.F.E. initiative and strengthen NC's child access prevention law to prevent firearm deaths and injuries to kids

**Two children a week die from firearm injury in North Carolina.** The rate of child firearm deaths in NC increased by 144% from 2015-2024.<sup>1</sup>

**Evidence is clear that guns are often not stored safely and that reducing access to guns saves lives.** Studies have shown that most kids know where parents keep their guns, but parents often think they don't.<sup>2</sup> It's estimated that up to 32% of suicide and unintentional youth firearm deaths could be prevented through safe storage of firearms in homes with youths.<sup>3</sup> A 2024 survey indicated that more than 40% of NC adults have a firearm in or around their home; over two in five adults store their firearm loaded and nearly half of firearms that are stored loaded are also unlocked.<sup>4</sup>

**Evaluation results show that NC S.A.F.E. is working, but it needs funding to continue.**<sup>5</sup> The [NC S.A.F.E.](#) (Secure All Firearms Effectively) statewide initiative to encourage safe firearm storage practices has operated since May, 2023 through temporary funds but the need to educate gun owners is ongoing. In addition to broad outreach via its media campaign, NC S.A.F.E. has distributed over 150,000 gun locks; it has established many partnerships to share messaging and resources; and has programs for schools and health professionals. This initiative, which has roots in a Child Fatality Task Force recommendation, needs \$2.26 million in recurring funds to continue. NC S.A.F.E. has been evaluated by RTI (Research Triangle International) and results show it's working! In fact, RTI recommended increased funding for NC S.A.F.E. [Here's a snapshot of the RTI evaluation results of NC S.A.F.E.:](#)<sup>6</sup>



**In the five year-period between 2020 and 2024, over 525 North Carolina children ages 17 and younger died from firearm injuries.**

Most guns used in youth suicide and school shootings come from home.

About 30% of NC middle and high school students report that it would take them less than an hour to get and be ready to fire a loaded gun without a parent or other adult's permission.

### Evidence of Progress Across Outcomes

Findings are based on a two-wave survey conducted in 2025 among adult firearm owners in North Carolina, allowing comparison of outcomes over time and by campaign exposure.



**Strengthen law to protect kids:** State laws that address access to guns by children and hold gun owners accountable for unsafe storage, often called “child access prevention laws,” are proven to be an effective tool to prevent gun deaths and injuries to kids.<sup>7</sup> Such laws vary among states, and North Carolina enacted its child access prevention law in 1993 which has since remained unchanged. **North Carolina’s current child access prevention law applies only to a gun owner or one who possesses a gun who “resides in the same premises as a minor.” The recommended change from the Task Force is to remove this phrase about residing with a minor from the law** (see highlighted language below).

A person who owns or possesses a gun who does not reside in the same premises as a minor may nevertheless be in situations where, for example, a child or teen (e.g., grandchild, nephew, neighbor, child they are babysitting) is visiting their home or riding in their car, and if their gun is not safely stored, the risks of what can happen when a child or teen accesses that gun are no different than they are for someone who resides with a child. Note that the law only applies under specific circumstances as stated in [N.C.G.S. § 14-315.1](#) where the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised minor would be able to gain access to the firearm and under other specific circumstances; see below.

### CFTF Recommended Change to Strengthen NC’s Child Access Prevention Law:

#### § 14-315.1. Storage of firearms to protect minors.

(a) Any person who ~~resides in the same premises as a minor~~, owns or possesses a firearm, and stores or leaves the firearm (i) in a condition that the firearm can be discharged and (ii) in a manner that the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised minor would be able to gain access to the firearm, is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor if a minor gains access to the firearm without the lawful permission of the minor’s parents or a person having charge of the minor and the minor:

- (1) Possesses it in violation of G.S. 14-269.2(b);
- (2) Exhibits it in a public place in a careless, angry, or threatening manner;
- (3) Causes personal injury or death with it not in self defense; or
- (4) Uses it in the commission of a crime.

(b) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a person from carrying a firearm on his or her body, or placed in such close proximity that it can be used as easily and quickly as if carried on the body.

(c) This section shall not apply if the minor obtained the firearm as a result of an unlawful entry by any person.

(d) "Minor" as used in this section means a person under 18 years of age who is not emancipated.

**The North Carolina Child Fatality Task Force** is a legislative study commission that is mandated by state law to recommend policy solutions to state leaders to prevent child death and promote child safety and well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> Information presented to the Child Fatality Task Force; data is limited to NC residents ages 0-17. Source: NC-VDRS, 2015-2023; SCHS Death Certificates, 2024. Analysis and presentation by the DPH Injury Epidemiology, Surveillance, and Informatics Unit.

<sup>2</sup> Baxley F, Miller M. Parental Misperceptions About Children and Firearms. Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med. 2006;160(5):542–547. doi:10.1001/archpedi.160.5.542.

<sup>3</sup> Monuteaux MC, Azrael D, Miller M. Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage With Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths. JAMA Pediatr. 2019;173(7):657–662. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1078

<sup>4</sup> Information presented to the NC Child Fatality Task Force by the NC Division of Public Health, sourced from the 2024 North Carolina Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Firearm Safety Module, <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/brfss/2024/nc/all/topics.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Information presented to the NC Child Fatality Task Force by the NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Evaluation conducted by RTI (Research Triangle International). Evaluation showed a variety of positive results that show the campaign is working.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Villarreal, S., Kim, R., Wagner, E. Somayaji, N., Davis, A., & Crifasi, C. K. (2024). Gun Violence in the United States 2022: Examining the Burden Among Children and Teens. Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/sites/default/files/2024-09/2022-cgvs-gun-violence-in-the-united-states.pdf>.