

To: Members of the Legislature

Date: June 17, 2013

Re: Urge You Not to Co-Sign/Support LRB2063: Wisconsin Firearms Freedom Act

From: American Family Children's Hospital
Aurora Health Care
Children's Medical Group
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
Children's Specialty Group
Columbia St. Mary's
Dean Clinic
Gundersen Health System
Hospital Sisters Health System
Marshfield Clinic

Medical College of Wisconsin
Ministry Health Care
Prevea Health
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative
SSM Health Care of Wisconsin
Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians
WI Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association
UW Hospital and Clinics
UW School of Medicine and Public Health

The organizations signed above urge you to consider the following facts and upon reading, hope you will decide **not to support LRB 2063. Specifically, we oppose strongly the section which prohibits physicians other than a psychiatrist to discuss firearms and firearm safety with their patients**, and provides that a physician who violates this prohibition may be fined not more than \$25,000, imprisoned not more than 9 months, or both.

This provision of the bill is detrimental to medical providers' ability to educate patients and in so doing prevent injury and death. A physician's relationship with his or her patient is an important place for discussion about the patient's safety. In many settings, these physician-patient communications prevent injury and death for adults and children. We believe this best practice does not interfere with the Second Amendment and does not in any way obstruct a patient or patient's parent's right to own, possess or use and patients to engage in open and frank discussions on matters pertaining to health and safety.

The proposed bill interferes in the patient-physician relationship in several ways. It impedes physicians' ability to deliver a firearm safety message to patients. Additionally, the proposed bill prevents the physician from providing important and expert-recommended safety counseling that can prevent injury and death. A primary goal of physicians is to *prevent* disease and injury. Physicians must be able to discuss firearm safety with the same freedom and thoroughness with which they discuss any other health or safety topic

Asking about weapons, including guns, is standard in any suicide assessment and psychiatrists are not and should not be the only physician providers who may be called upon to perform such an assessment. Delicate and serious mental health needs present themselves in many health care settings. It is critical that all physicians have the opportunity to engage in conversations with their patients about the patient's safety. It is dangerous for government to compromise a physician's ability to use medical judgment as to information or treatment, particularly where lives of the patient and others are at risk.

The proposed language interferes with physician-patient relationship with a patient who is a minor and his/her parents or guardians. Asking a parent or guardian a question about gun ownership can create an opportunity to educate caregivers about potential dangers to which their child is exposed if the gun is not safely secured. Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death in children older than one year. For this reason anticipatory guidance is a major component of well-child care and injury-visits. Counseling parents on firearm ownership and safe storage practices is no different than counseling for other products or injury risks – safety gates/stairs, hot burners, poisoning prevention, shelving or televisions that could be pulled down -- to mitigate risk of injury to children in the environments in which they live and play.

The accidental death of a child as a result of an unlocked or an available firearm is preventable, and as physicians we want to take every possible step to eliminate these deaths. In the United States in 2007, the most recent year for which data is available, 1 out of 6 injury deaths ages one year to 19 years old were firearm-related, and 1 out of every 4 injury deaths for those age 15-19 were firearm-related.

We all want to do everything we can to ensure the safety and well-being of the families in our communities. We urge you not to support LRB 2063 due to the provisions that prohibit physicians from providing the best care they can to the families of Wisconsin. Thank you for your consideration.