HB 1612: IMPLEMENTING A SUICIDE-SAFER HOMES PUBLIC EDUCATION PLATFORM

*House Bill 1612 establishes a public-private partnership fund to implement the work of the Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force.*

In 2016, **HB 2793** passed the legislature with strong, bipartisan support. Washington’s legislature recognizes the enormous toll that over 1,100 suicide deaths each year takes on families and communities across the state. It recognizes the need for a robust public education campaign designed to raise awareness of the role everyone can play in preventing suicide and the role key groups - including firearm retailers and pharmacists - can play in educating the public.

Many people do not realize:

- Nearly **80%** of all deaths by firearms in WA state are suicides
- **67%** of male Veteran suicides in the U.S. are by firearm
- Firearms are the **most lethal method used in suicide**
- For young people **ages 10-18**, most suicide deaths and attempts occur through means like firearms and Rx medications that are easily accessible in homes
- To prevent suicides, we must motivate heads of households to **improve safe storage and disposal practices to reduce deaths and overdoses**

A sustained public health campaign will ensure that prevention steps become as well known as the Heimlich maneuver. Steps include recognizing warning signs, empathizing and listening, asking directly about suicide, removing dangers to ensure immediate safety, and getting help.

HB 2793 established two critical task forces that are working to design public health messages for the public and to develop training for pharmacists and firearm retailers to **educate their patients and customers about steps to suicide prevention and safe storage practices**.

This collaboration is unprecedented. Second amendment rights groups, firearm retailers, and pharmacists want to be part of the solution. A recent statewide survey of firearm retailers demonstrates their desire to educate customers about suicide prevention, including a willingness to post and disseminate suicide prevention materials, and to work proactively with customers find safe storage solutions to protect their families from suicide.

**House Bill 1612 establishes a public-private partnership fund to implement the Suicide-Safer Homes public education campaign in the coming years. This includes:**

- Funding to train firearm dealers, including a modest incentive to pay for employees’ time to complete a 60-minute suicide prevention training.
- Creating materials used to support firearm retailers, pharmacists, and other health care providers in suicide prevention counseling and education on the need to create suicide-safer homes.
- Funding for pilot studies in two Washington counties with high suicide rates to raise awareness of suicide, disseminate safe-storage devices, and mobilize community members including firearm retailers and pharmacists.
- Requiring dental professionals, at their request, to participate in one-time suicide prevention training to understand how they can assist patients by providing a message about safe-storage and disposal of medications, identify warning signs for suicide, and how to get additional help for patients who may be at risk.