Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_;

 I am a Pediatrician who cares for children in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. I am concerned about the safety of children in my community posed by Division 5 of HF 517. This provision would remove the minimum age (currently 14 years) to use a hand gun as long as a parent or guardian maintains “physical presence near the child conducive to hands-on instruction”. The adult must also “maintain visual and verbal contact at all times with the child”. As a Pediatrician, I can attest that children are not developmentally ready to handle guns and encourage you to oppose Division V of HF 517 for the sake of our public health.

 Child development experts tell us that children’s executive functioning (using our brains to multitask, control impulses, and remain flexible enough to change course) does not mature until well after 14 years of age. Most children are not able to simultaneously monitor the line of fire while safely firing a gun. Their brains are not adequately developed. This skill will not come until the middle teen years or even later. Yet children as young as 3 have adequate finger strength to pull the trigger of most hand guns.

 Proponents of this bill have presented the story of two young women who are competitive shooters as justification for eliminating the 14 year old minimum on hand guns. This family exemplifies diligent care in firearm handling, but they are not the norm. We cannot write laws for the exceptional situation and hope everyone else rises to the occasion. We have to write laws to protect all children in all situations. Unfortunately, this bill does not require training of parent or child, nor does in limit use to a controlled environment. It does not establish a minimum age for possessing a gun.

 This is a public health issue. The safety of the child handling the gun is at risk. Likewise the safety of everyone within range of that gun is at also put at risk without their consent. As written, the bill would allow toddlers to possess hand guns and take them to a public space as long as the parent was in “physical presence near the child and in visual and verbal contact”. It is hard to know if a physical presence is adequate for an adult to control the child’s use of the gun. “No parent in their right mind would give a toddler a gun!” you might say. As a Pediatrician, I have seen many irresponsible things done by parents. The bill does not adequately protect public safety.

 We restrict all kinds of privileges and rights for minors. We don’t let kids have an unrestricted license to drive until 18 years old. We don’t let them drink until they are 21 years old. We don’t let them vote until they are 18 years old. We must also continue to limit their gun use. Please oppose Division V of HF 517. The 2nd Amendment does not speak the right of children to keep and bear arms.

Sincerely,

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