

School Committee reaffirms support of safe gun storage initiative

By PATRICK BLAIS

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WOBURN - The city's School Committee reaffirmed their support of a safe firearm storage resolution that directs Schools' Superintendent Dr. Matthew Crowley to craft a letter reminding gun-owning parents to keep their weapons locked away from the reach of children.

During their most recent meeting in the Joyce Middle School, the School Committee voted unanimously in support of adopting the resolution after Student Services and Achievement (SSA) Subcommittee Chair Jessie Wetzel explained the language mirrored a safe gun storage initiative endorsed by the board back in 2022.

"It's a resolution about the safe storage of firearms and how Woburn Public Schools supports that as well as messaging [being sent] home to families in our districtwide calendar at the end of the year," Wetzel said of the 17-sentence resolution, which makes clear that research from multiple law enforcement and public health advocacy groups suggests that many suicides and gun-related deaths may be prevented by adhering to safe firearm storage practices.

"The SSA took it upon us to just reaffirm the resolution, especially with it being towards the end of the school year, when kids are at home more," added the School Committee member. "We thought it was important the full committee reaffirm it because it's such an important topic. We talk about sunscreen and how important that is. We talk about pool safety. But we don't talk a lot about weapons

storage. It's a taboo topic for a lot of people or they don't know how to talk about it."

The School Committee adopted a nearly identical resolution back in 2022 at the behest of former member Andrew Lipsett and former educator and Woburn resident Diana Scinto.

There was no debate around the concept of sending home information about the state's gun safety regulations to remind local gun owners about their obligations. However, School Committee veteran Patricia Chisholm, apparently hoping to clarify the resolution's purpose, emphasized the board was not taking any position in regards to gun ownership itself.

"I just want to make sure we understand this about safety issues, and it is an important issue. It's the same thing as [speaking out about] wearing seat belts and kids wearing helmets," said Chisholm. "It's not saying people cannot own guns and we're not [taking any position] against the Second Amendment."

"I completely agree. Guns aren't the problem. It's the way [they can fall into the wrong hands if they're not secured properly]," agreed Wetzel. "You're absolutely able to have a gun. Just store it the right way."

According to the resolution, roughly 4.6 million children live in households where loaded or unlocked firearms are kept, and on an annual basis an average of 360 children under the age of 18 accidentally shoot themselves or someone else after gaining access to such weaponry. The document also cites statistics that estimates that of the 687 children who commit suicide with a firearm each year, nearly 80 percent of them used a gun belonging to a family member.

"Research shows that secure firearm storage practices are associated with up to a 78 percent reduction in the risk of self-inflicted firearm injuries and up to an 85

percent reduction in the risk of unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens," reads the safe gun storage initiative.

Besides sending home a letter to families regarding the topic, the School Committee has also directed the superintendent to update student handbooks to include information reminding parents about their obligations under Massachusetts law to secure their firearms when they are not on their person.