Dear Governor Scott, Senator Haridopolos, Senator Bennett, Senator Rich, Representative Canon, and Representative Saunders,

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), and the American College of Surgeons (ACS) oppose Senate Bill 432 and House Bill 155. Together, our professional medical associations represent 146,400 physicians across the country.

Our member physicians are deeply troubled by this legislation. If enacted, it would restrict physicians from asking about guns in the home without fear of sanction by the Florida Board of Medicine, and hamper doctors from practicing proactive preventive care with patients and families.

The bills, if enacted, would limit physicians’ ability to do what they do best – compassionately and effectively care for their patients.

Evidence shows that physician counseling is effective in children’s safety in homes with firearms. A 2008 study in the journal *Pediatrics* found that individuals who received
physician counseling were more likely to report the adoption of at least one safe gun-storage practice. These practices were envisioned by Florida’s first-in-the-nation Child Access Prevention Law, enacted in 1989.

Primary care physicians are very often the first medical professionals to identify patients with depression and other mental health issues. The presence of a firearm in a home increases the risk of suicide even among those without a previous psychiatric diagnosis. The increased risk of suicide is particularly striking for younger people where guns are stored loaded and/or unlocked.

In addition, physicians are also often the first to identify victims of child and domestic abuse. Because of the dangers women, particularly pregnant women, and children face when domestic abuse exists in a home, the need for physicians to discuss safety and violence prevention, including whether a gun or other weapon has been used, is vital. It may mean the very survival of these women and children.

The patient-physician relationship is a confidential one. If the government begins to restrict the trust and confidentiality between a physician, a patient, and--for children--a patient’s parents, then the health and well-being of patients is placed in jeopardy. Tragedies that could have been prevented by a simple conversation will, instead, occur.

The AAP, AACAP, and ACS join with our physicians in Florida and call on you to oppose this legislation and to keep patients safe by maintaining a strong physician-patient-family relationship.

Sincerely,

O. Marion Burton, MD, FAAP
President, American Academy of Pediatrics

Laurence L. Greenhill, MD
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