



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
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Peter F. Neronha
Attorney General

April 8, 2026

The Honorable Carol Hagan McEntee
Chairwoman
House Committee on Judiciary
State House, House Lounge
Providence, RI 02903

Re: HB 8068: Juvenile Firearm Possession

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I write today to express my support for HB 8068, legislation that clarifies it is unlawful for any person under the age of 18 to possess a firearm.

This bill makes a simple but important change by removing the words “and use” from §11-47-33, thereby restoring the original intent of the General Assembly: to ensure that firearms remain out of the hands of children. As currently written, the inclusion of the phrase “and use” injects ambiguity that can hinder effective enforcement. In practice, this language has been interpreted by some judges to require proof that a juvenile not only possessed a firearm, but also “used” it to establish a violation. This undermines the statute’s purpose and hinders enforcement efforts.

HB 8068 resolves this issue by clearly establishing that possession alone constitutes a violation. This clarification restores the statute’s intended scope and enables proactive intervention, allowing authorities to act before a firearm is used in a dangerous or unlawful manner.

The need for this clarity is evident. Since 2024 alone, my Office has handled approximately 60 cases involving juveniles in possession of firearms. These cases pose serious risks to both the children and the broader community. Firearms remain the leading cause of death for children and teens in the United States.¹ In Rhode Island, between 2019 and 2023, over 130 emergency department visits, 23 hospitalizations, and 11 deaths of children were attributed to firearms.² These numbers underscore the urgency of ensuring that our laws function as intended to prevent access and reduce harm.

¹ [Guns Remain Leading Cause of Death for Children and Teens | Johns Hopkins | Bloomberg School of Public Health](#)

² [RIKCFactbook2025](#)

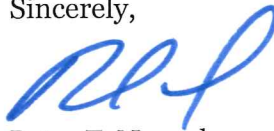
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From a public safety perspective, keeping firearms out of the hands of minors is critical. Early intervention can prevent escalation, reduce the risk of accidental or intentional injury, and support broader violence prevention efforts. This bill strengthens those efforts by ensuring the law is clear, enforceable, and aligned with its original purpose.

Importantly, this bill does not expand the law beyond its original intent or alter how juvenile cases are handled. Juvenile matters will continue to be addressed in family court, where the focus remains on rehabilitation. The legislation also preserves existing statutory exceptions, including for minors engaged in activities such as hunting, ceremonial events, and competitive or target shooting under the supervision of a qualified adult.

Ensuring that minors do not have access to firearms is a necessary and measured step toward keeping our communities, and our children, safe. For these reasons, I urge the committee to pass HB 8068. As always, I appreciate the Committee's consideration, and I am available for any further questions.

Sincerely,



Peter F. Neronha
Attorney General