

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



Wisconsin Chapter

Wisconsin Chapter
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Via Email

December 8, 2015

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Opposition to Senate Bill 301

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The Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (WIAAP) opposes Senate Bill 301, which would remove the lower age limit for participating in the hunting mentorship program in the State of Wisconsin. It would also allow the mentor to carry a separate weapon.

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Current law allows children ages 10 and 11 to participate in hunting in Wisconsin if accompanied at arm's length by a mentor age 18 and older. There are no training requirements for either the child or the mentor, and any 18 year old adult may serve as the mentor. Since the mentorship program was started over five years ago there have been several incidents involving children under age 12, as reported on the DNR website:

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- In 2014 a 42 year old man was shot by an 11 year old boy while turkey hunting.
- In 2012 a 48 year old man was shot by a 9 year old boy while dove hunting.
- In 2011 an 18 year old man was shot by a 10 year old boy while pheasant hunting.
- In 2011 an 11 year old shot himself while hunting.

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WIAAP believes that these data demonstrate the inherent risk of allowing 10 and 11 year olds to handle weapons, even with a mentor. Extending the mentorship program to even younger ages stands to compound this risk further.

Chapter Web site

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Many young children lack the physical development necessary to safely handle a hunting firearm. This activity requires strength and coordination that come with pubertal development. Young children also lack the brain development necessary to concentrate on safety rules, calculate distances, refrain from acting on impulses, and understand the true dangers of the weapon. Even at "arm's length" a mentor may not be able to be vigilant enough to prevent a tragic mishap when dealing with children under age ten.

As a comparison, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children be ten years old before they are allowed to cross the street by themselves, because younger

children are not able to do the math required to calculate the speed of the car and the time available to cross. Until age 10 it is also recommended that children use bikes with coaster brakes, because they lack the strength and coordination needed to use hand brakes.

The long-term psychological effects of being involved in a hunting accident can be devastating for a child. Whether it's witnessing an unintentional shooting, being a victim of an unintentional shooting, or unintentionally shooting another person, a child would likely never fully recover from the emotional toll. A child so involved could easily develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a long term mental health problem that is difficult to manage.

Alcohol consumption is often part of the hunting culture in Wisconsin. Alcohol use has great potential to negatively affect the quality of supervision provided by a mentor. The lack of mentorship training in our state also places some 10 and 11 year old children at risk; while many of the hunting advocates in the state would be excellent mentors, not all hunters age 18 and up have the same skill set. Younger children need even more intensive and constant supervision than do 10 and 11 year olds, making the odds of a mishap greater in younger children if the mentor is inexperienced, impaired, or distracted by use of their own weapon.

In summary, WIAAP believes that Senate Bill 301 is not in the best interest of Wisconsin's children. Additionally, strengthening the requirements for mentors of 10 and 11 year olds has the potential to make these children safer when hunting. We urge you to vote against this bill.

Sincerely yours,

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS
Wisconsin Chapter

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey W. Britton MD FAAP". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Jeffrey W. Britton, MD, FAAP
President

