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Testimony of Sophia Young, Programs Research Fellow, Brady  
Support for HB 636  
Before the Maryland House Judiciary Committee  
February 19th, 2020

Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Other Distinguished Members of the Maryland House Judiciary Committee,

Founded in 1974, Brady works across Congress, courts, and communities, uniting gun owners and non-gun owners alike, to take action, not sides, and end America's gun violence epidemic. Our organization today carries the name of Jim Brady, who was shot and severely injured in the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan. Jim and his wife, Sarah, led the fight to pass federal legislation requiring background checks for gun sales. Brady continues to uphold Jim and Sarah's legacy by uniting Americans from coast to coast, red and blue, young and old, liberal and conservative, to combat the epidemic of gun violence.

There are evidence-based policy solutions that we know will address the gun violence epidemic in Maryland. And make no mistake, gun violence is an epidemic, both nationwide and in the state of Maryland. Over 650 people die in Maryland each year, on average, due to firearms. Unlike some states, however, the majority of these deaths are due to homicide, which takes the lives of almost 400 Marylanders per year.<sup>1</sup> Much of this high homicide rate is driven by the disproportionate number of injuries and deaths in Baltimore: 2019 was the second deadliest year on record for the city, with nearly 350 homicides within a 365 day period.<sup>2</sup> Importantly for this legislation, firearms are also the leading cause of death among both kids and teens in the state of Maryland.<sup>3</sup>

**The bill before you today, HB 636, will encourage responsible gun ownership and safe storage norms and save lives by updating Maryland's existing child access prevention law to be more inclusive and ensure that fewer minors can, and do, access firearms.**

Nationwide, we know that too many minors are able to access firearms due to improperly stored firearms, frequently in the home. More than half of gun owners do not secure their firearms with locks or other safe

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<sup>1</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety, "Gun Violence in Maryland," <https://everytownresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Every-State-Fact-Sheet-Maryland.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Travis Fedschun, "Baltimore Sees Second Deadliest Year On Record in 2019, Homicide Clearance Rate Under 40 Percent," Fox News, available at <https://www.foxnews.com/us/baltimore-homicide-rate-2019-crime-deadly-year-police-clearance>.

<sup>3</sup> "Gun Violence in Maryland."

storage methods, and almost 4.6 million minors live in homes with unsecured guns.<sup>4</sup> A study published by American Academy of Pediatrics in 2018 found that within a sample of parents who owned guns, only one third stored all household firearms locked and unloaded.<sup>5</sup> One study showed that over 70 percent of children reported knowing the storage location of the household firearm, and that 1 in 5 parents who reported that their child had never handled the household firearm were contradicted by their child's report. As a result, 70-90 percent of firearms used in unintentional shooting, school shootings and suicides by minors are acquired from home, or from the homes of friends or relatives.<sup>6</sup>

Unintentional firearm shootings involving minors are preventable. Studies show that keeping a gun locked and unloaded are associated with a protective effect against unintentional firearm injuries in homes with children and teenagers.<sup>7</sup> This finding is bolstered by recent research from 2018 showed that Child Access Prevention laws ("CAP laws") that require safe storage of firearms are associated with a significant reduction in unintentional pediatric firearm injuries.<sup>8</sup> School shootings are also facilitated by kids or teens having access to unsecured guns at home. In a review of all school shootings with at least three victims dead or injured since 1990, the majority of shooters acquired their gun from their household or from a relative's home.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, studies have found that for minors who have used a firearm to take their own life, 82 percent used a firearm belonging to a family member, and 64 percent of those guns were stored unlocked.<sup>10</sup> In 2017 alone, 729 children died by firearm suicide.<sup>11</sup> As is the case with adults, the availability of firearms and their lethal nature greatly increases the risk of a fatal outcome in a suicide attempt.<sup>12</sup> Firearms are the most lethal method used in suicide deaths, with a fatality rate of approximately 90 percent.<sup>13</sup> Frequently, the decision to harm oneself is made abruptly: A quarter of individuals who attempt suicide make the attempt within 5 minutes of deciding to end their lives.<sup>14</sup> This means that putting barriers in place to prevent easy access to lethal means

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Azrael, et al, "Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey," *Journal of Urban Health* 95 (2018), available at [www.doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0261-7](http://www.doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0261-7).

<sup>5</sup> John Scott, Deborah Azrael, and Matthew Miller, "Firearm Storage in Homes With Children With Self-Harm Risk Factors," American Academy of Pediatrics (February 2018), <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2018/02/19/peds.2017-2600.info>.

<sup>6</sup> Renee M. Johnson, et al., "Who Are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides?," *Suicide and Life-threatening Behavior* 40, no. 6 (2010): 609-611; Guohua Li, et al., "Factors Associated with the Intent of Firearm-related Injuries in Pediatric Trauma Patients," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* 150, no. 11 (1996): 1160-1165; John Woodrow Cox and Steven Rich, "'The Gun is Not in the Closet,'" *The Washington Post*, Aug.1, 2018, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2018/08/01/feature/school-shootings-should-parents-be-charged-for-failing-to-lock-up-guns-used-by-their-kids/>.

<sup>7</sup> David Grossman et al. "Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Firearm Injuries," *JAMA*. 2005 Feb 9;293(6):707-14.

<sup>8</sup> Emma Hamilton, et al. "Variability of Child Access Prevention Laws and Pediatric Firearm Injuries." *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 84, no. 4 (April 2018): 613-19.

<sup>9</sup> Tawnell Hobbes, "Most Guns Used in School Shootings Come From Home," *The Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 5 2018, [www.wsj.com/articles/in-school-shootings-most-guns-come-from-home-1522920600](http://www.wsj.com/articles/in-school-shootings-most-guns-come-from-home-1522920600).

<sup>10</sup> The Rand Corporation, "The Effects of Child-Access Prevention Laws," March 2018, <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/child-access-prevention.html>, citing Webster, D. W., L. H. Freed, S. Frattaroli, and M. H. Wilson, "How Delinquent Youths Acquire Guns: Initial Versus Most Recent Gun Acquisitions," *Journal of Urban Health*, Vol. 79, No. 1, 2002, pp. 60-69 and LaFree, G., and C. Birbeck, *Controlling New Mexico Juveniles' Possession of Firearms*, Albuquerque, N.M.: New Mexico Criminal Justice Statistical Analysis Center, Working Paper 27, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention & Control, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Web-based Injury Statistics Query & Reporting System (WISQARS) Injury Mortality Reports, 1999-2013, for National, Regional, and States (Jan. 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Madeline Drexler, Guns and Suicide: The Hidden Toll, *Harvard Public Health* at 24, 26, [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine\\_article/guns-suicide/](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/guns-suicide/).

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Miller, "The Epidemiology of Case Fatality Rates for Suicide in the Northeast\*1." *Annals of Emergency Medicine* 43, no. 6 (2004): 723-30.

<sup>14</sup> Simon, Olga Von, Alan C. Swann, Kenneth E. Powell, Lloyd B. Potter, M-j Kresnow and Patrick O'Carroll. "Characteristics of impulsive suicide attempts and attempters." *Suicide & life-threatening behavior* 32 1 Suppl (2001): 49-59.

can delay a suicide attempt in the event of a crisis, giving someone who is struggling more time to seek help. In fact, research supports that storing firearms locked and unloaded can be an effective measure to reduce suicide attempts.<sup>15</sup>

Various studies have found that CAP laws are associated with reduced rates of suicide and unintentional firearms deaths and injuries among children and teens by up to 54 percent.<sup>16</sup> Research suggests that CAP laws also increase safe storage behavior<sup>17</sup> and one recent study has found that a modest increase in safe firearm storage could prevent up to 32 percent of suicide and unintentional firearm fatalities among youth, and another predicted that child access prevention law enactment can reduce the annual number of self-inflicted gun injuries by 26 percent.<sup>18</sup> In fact, unsafe storage was least likely among families in states with both CAP laws and stronger firearm legislation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the data shows that state CAP laws are associated with reductions in *overall* suicide rates among 14-17 year olds, meaning that minors are not attempting suicide by other methods when firearms are inaccessible.<sup>20</sup> The risks associated with access to firearms do not simply dissipate when one turns 16. In fact, firearms are used in 42 percent of suicides by 16 and 17-year olds.<sup>21</sup> It is appropriate that this proposed bill expands the obligation to prevent all minors under the age of 18 from accessing firearms.

Further, this proposed law does not infringe upon an individual's Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms in the home—rather, responsible firearms ownership comes with a duty to ensure that these lethal weapons are kept out of the hands of minors who cannot yet responsibly handle firearms themselves. Research clearly shows that robust child access prevention and safe storage laws help protect children and reduce the tragic deaths of firearm suicide, and unintentional shootings by kids and teens in homes across America.

**Brady strongly encourages the House Judiciary Committee to vote in favor of HB 636, which mandates that all firearms must be safely stored in the presence of those under 18 to prevent injuries and fatalities.**

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<sup>15</sup> Shenassa ED, Rogers ML, Spalding KL, Roberts MB. “Safer Storage of Firearms At Home and Risk of Suicide: A Study of Protective Factors in a Nationally Representative Sample,” *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*. 2004; 58(10):841-848.

<sup>16</sup> Emma C. Hamilton, et al., “Variability of Child Access Prevention Laws and Pediatric Firearm Injuries,” *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery* 84, no. 4 (2018): 613–619.

<sup>17</sup> Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, “Child Access Prevention,” <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/child-access-prevention/>.

<sup>18</sup> Michael C. Monuteaux et al., “Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage with Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Deaths Among U.S. Youths,” *JAMA Pediatrics* 173 no. 657 (2019); Jeffrey Desimone, “Child Access Prevention Laws and Nonfatal Gun Injuries,” 80 *Southern Economic Journal* no. 1 (2013).

<sup>19</sup> Prickett, Kate C, et al. “State Firearm Laws, Firearm Ownership, and Safety Practices Among Families of Preschool-Aged Children.” *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 104, no. 6, June 2014, pp. 1080–1086.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Webster, et al. “Association Between Youth-Focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides,” *JAMA*. 2004 Aug 4;292(5):594-601.

<sup>21</sup> National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Web-Based Injury Statistics Query & Reporting System (WISQARS) Fatal Injury Reports, National, Regional and States, 1999 to 2017. Calculated using the average suicide injury deaths among 16-17-year olds from 2013-2017.