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2022 SESSION
Written Testimony

BILL NO: SB0676
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
POSITION: Letter of Information
TITLE: Firearm Safety - Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law)

PURPOSE:

The purpose of SB0676 is to change the circumstances under which an adult is criminally responsible for leaving a firearm where a minor could obtain it. It removes liability if the minor obtains the weapon while supervised by an adult or as a result of an unlawful entry. This bill prohibits an individual from leaving a firearm in a location where they knew or should have known that a minor could reasonably be able to access the firearm. This bill will also require the Deputy Secretary of Public Health Services to develop a youth suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide.

RATIONALE:

Children and teens continue to make up a considerable portion of gun violence victims in the United States. Nationally, nine children and teens are killed by guns every single day. For every fatality approximately five youth are injured, often resulting in lifelong physical and mental

consequences.¹ An estimated one-thousand high school-aged youth die by suicide using a gun each year and the rate of suicide by gun has increased by nearly 60% from 2010 to 2016.²

Many of these injuries and accidents involving youth are between family members or classmates and the weapons are attained at home due to unsecured storage. An estimated 74% of guns used in school shootings were obtained from the home of the shooter's friend or relative.³

Local trends are equally sobering. In Maryland, guns are the leading cause of death for children and teens. An average of 64 youth die by guns each year in the state.⁴ In Anne Arundel County, 15% of all police reported gun incidents where age is known involve a victim under 18 years old. Out of these incidents, youth made up 13% of reported injuries and 6% of reported deaths.⁵

These tragically all-too-often incidents of gun violence have amplified during the pandemic. The start of 2020 saw a historic rise in gun sales and rising health needs among youth. These coinciding challenges compounded with the existing prevalence of youth gun violence have made necessary stronger policies that limit youth access to guns and that promote widespread safe storage practices.

There is long-standing proven evidence that Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws prevent gun injuries and deaths, especially stricter CAP laws that limit youth access to guns, set minimum age requirements and require safe storage practices. States with strong CAP laws have been found to have up to a 54% reduction in unintentional injuries, suicides and school shootings. Even modest increases in households safely storing guns could prevent an estimated third of all youth gun deaths due to suicide or unintentional injury.⁶

Maryland's CAP law is among the strictest in the nation, penalizing adults for negligent storage of a gun in a place and manner that a child could or does gain access. The additions proposed in SB0676 would strengthen the reach of the existing state policy, further reducing the risk and impact of gun violence on youth.

¹ CDC. (2020). *Nonfatal Injury Reports 2000-2018*. Accessed using WISQARS. <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/nonfatal.html>. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund. Children's Defense Fund. (2021). *State of America's Children Report*.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. WISQARS—Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System. Accessed August 15, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>

³ National Threat Assessment Center. (2019). Protecting America's Schools: A US Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence. *US Secret Service, Department of Homeland Security*. <https://bit.ly/2U7vnwa>.

⁴ Children and teens gun deaths: CDC, WONDER, five-year average: 2016–2020, ages 0–19; Leading causes of death: CDC, WONDER, 2020, ages 1–19.

⁵ Anne Arundel County and Annapolis City Police Department's gun incident report data (2016-2021).

⁶ Hamilton, E.C., Miller, C. C., Cox Jr., C. S., Lally, K. P., & Ausin, M. T. (2018). Variability of child access prevention laws and pediatric firearm injuries. *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, 84(4): 613-619.

The bill's inclusion of a guide to be developed by the Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services would advance public awareness about the importance of youth suicide prevention and safe storage. The guidebook would standardize local prevention and intervention efforts as part of a statewide commitment to reducing youth gun violence.

The Anne Arundel County Department of Health supports the proposed guide requirement as it aligns with local efforts to increase public awareness about the harms of youth gun violence and importance of safe storage. The Department of Health is abstaining from a position on the increased penalties proposed in the bill as criminal law and enforcement fall outside the purview of local health departments.

This position is supported by the Health Department's leadership for the Anne Arundel County Gun Violence Intervention Team, a coalition of municipal partners with members from over two dozen agencies. Driven by local data and best practice of proven gun violence intervention programs, the coalition is implementing strategies to prevent and reduce gun violence countywide. One continued area of concern is the high rate of gun homicides among young adult black males in the City of Annapolis. Given the far-reaching implications of strong CAP laws, these proposed bills would contribute towards this concentration of gun violence among our local community youth.