



March 15, 2022

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – SB 676: Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention
(Jaelynn’s Law)

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS and WPS support Senate Bill 676: Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn’s Law) (SB 676), which strengthens firearms storage requirements to keep children safe and provides education about secure firearms storage and the negative consequences of unsafe storage practices on youth suicide.

Suicide among teens and young adults has nearly tripled since the 1940s. Among the risk factors is easy access to lethal means. The leading causes of death among youth ages fifteen (15) to twenty-four (24) continue to be unintentional injury and homicide, followed by suicide.¹ In the last decade, suicides by firearm in minors have increased substantially (by 82%)¹ and are the second leading cause of deaths for children under 18 in Maryland.² One of the ways to prevent suicide is the restriction of access to lethal means. Additionally, most firearms involved in these deaths by firearms in minors belong to a parent or relative.³ Laws preventing children’s access to firearms reduce the number of suicides by firearm significantly.⁴

Studies suggest that the peak age of onset for having depressive-like symptoms is fourteen (14) to fifteen (15) years of age and the majority of individuals who develop depression experience their first clinically significant episode during the transition from middle to late adolescence (i.e., ages fifteen (15) to eighteen (18) years of age).^{5,6} By nature, children and adolescents are learning to regulate their emotions. Adolescents, in particular, are highly vulnerable to their peers’ influence and opinions; and their ability to communicate how they feel is often overwhelmed by their emotions. For all these reasons, adolescents and young adults are a very vulnerable population for self-inflicted injuries and outward aggression, and guns are a quick and dangerous way to bring their impulses to completion.



MPS and WPS members often encounter well-meaning families who believe that educating their children about the risk of guns is enough. But many children involved in firearm deaths do not reach mental health services and are not exposed to this type of education. The many recent suicide-homicide mass shootings that have taken place across our nation and in Maryland schools are a manifestation of the improper storage of guns by the parents. This bill combines education and requirements that together can keep more children safe from firearm deaths.

MPS and WPS strongly urge you to support SB 676 for it would save the lives of young people by suicide, homicide, and unintentional injury. For all the reasons above, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report of SB 676.

If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Joint Legislative Action Committee

References:

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3. Renee M. Johnson, PhD, MPH, Catherine Barber, MPA, Deborah Azrael, PhD, David E. Clark, MD, and David Hemenway, PhD, "Who are the owners of firearms used in adolescent suicides?" *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* (December 2010)
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