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SB 858

February 21, 2022

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: Senate Bill 858 – Firearm Safety - Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law)
POSITION: Support

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** Senate Bill (SB) 858.

This bill aims to prevent youth suicides by implementing safe storage requirements, imposes penalties for violating the requirements, and amends existing law such that violations could be considered negligent. Further, BCA also supports the subsections of this bill that would require the Deputy Secretary of Public Health Services to develop a suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide with stakeholder input, as well as the grant funds that would be made available for local health departments and other interested organizations to provide safe firearms storage education.

Reducing access to lethal means via safe storage practices among persons at risk of suicide can be lifesaving. Research indicates that the interval between deciding to act and attempt suicide can be as short as five or ten minutes.¹ When a highly lethal method is unavailable or difficult to access, people tend NOT to substitute a different method, meaning the person's life was saved. Research shows that policies restricting access to lethal means – including firearms – have been effective in reducing suicides.² Incidentally, this can be true not only for those contemplating self-harm, but also for those contemplating harm to others.

Mandated firearm safety training and safe storage guidance are important, but research shows that they alone may not be enough to change gun owners' behavior. In some studies, respondents did not store unloaded guns or ammunition separately because it might prohibit quick access for self-defense purposes. For example, a 2015 survey of gun owners found that while 60% of respondents had participated in formal firearms training, only 32% reported storing all guns unloaded and locked. 46% reported storing at least one gun unloaded and unlocked or loaded and locked. Additionally, the survey showed that receipt of safety training was *negatively* associated with safe storage.³ The penalties proposed in this bill are important, as they would provide additional incentives for gun owners to store their firearms safely.

This bill could be lifesaving, as it could prevent young people from harming themselves or others. For these reasons, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on SB 858.

¹ Simon OR, Swann AC, Powell KE, Potter LB, Kresnow MJ, O'Carroll PW. Characteristics of impulsive suicide attempts and attempters. *Suicide Life Threat Behav.* 2001;32(1 Suppl):49-59. doi:10.1521/suli.32.1.5.49.24212

² Sale E, Hendricks M, Weil V, Miller C, Perkins S, McCudden S. Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM): An Evaluation of a Suicide Prevention Means Restriction Training Program for Mental Health Providers. *Community Ment Health J.* 2018;54(3):293-301. doi:10.1007/s10597-017-0190-z

³ Berrigan J, Azrael D, Hemenway D, Miller M. Firearms training and storage practices among US gun owners: a nationally representative study. *Inj Prev.* 2019;25(Suppl 1):i31-i38. doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2018-043126