



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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**Senate Bill 858
Firearm Safety-Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law)
Judicial Proceedings Committee - February 21, 2023
SUPPORT**

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club** (WDC) for the 2023 legislative session. WDC is one of Maryland's largest and most active Democratic clubs with hundreds of politically active members, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of SB0858. According to a November 2021 report by the [Children's Safety Network](#):

- Firearm suicides are the fourth leading cause of injury/death for children ages 10-19.
- Approximately nine children and adolescents ages 10-19 die by firearm each day in the United States; three of those deaths are suicide-related firearm injury.
- Firearm injury/suicide death rates increased by 6.3% per year on average between 2010 and 2019.

According to a 2019 study published in [JAMA Pediatrics](#), "it is estimated that 6% to 32% of youth firearm deaths (by suicide and unintentional firearm injury) could be prevented, depending on the probability that an intervention motivates adults who currently do not lock all household firearms to instead lock all guns in their home."

This is the sixth time a bill to restrict minors' access to firearms has been introduced in the Maryland General Assembly, dating back to 2013 following the Sandy Hook tragedy in December 2012. That was ten years ago. We can only speculate how many children's lives would have been saved if the General Assembly had passed restrictions in 2013. Perhaps Jaelynn Willey would still be with us. It's clear that children's lives can be saved if we prevent access to firearms. We urge the Maryland General Assembly to enact these more robust gun storage requirements, to prevent those exercising their rights to have firearms in their homes from careless storage leading to the injury and death of children. As the *New York Times*' Thomas Friedman wrote in his February 8, 2022 column, "the pervasive claim that 'I have my rights' but 'I don't have responsibilities' is unraveling our country today." The right to keep and bear firearms is not an unrestricted right and must be paired with requirements for responsible gun ownership that can save lives, including preventable deaths of young people by suicide.

We know that Maryland's existing gun laws are not sufficiently stringent to prevent access to weapons by children. That is why we strongly support the enactment of legislation to strengthen Maryland's gun storage requirements and hold gun-owning adults accountable for the consequences of unsafe storage practices and negligent behavior. To quote New Mexico State Senator Daniel Ivey-Soto, "A law without penalties is simply a suggestion."

We ask our Maryland legislators to prioritize protecting children from injury and death, over unfettered right to gun ownership. **We ask for your support for SB0858 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.**

Diana E. Conway
WDC President

Lynn Olson
WDC Advocacy Committee