

Maryland School Counselor Association

To: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Bill: SB 858 - Firearm Safety - Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law)
Date: February 21, 2023
Position: Favorable

The Maryland School Counselor Association supports SB 858 – Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn’s Law). It is imperative that our law be updated to protect Maryland’s youth.

Youth Suicide: The Crisis in Maryland

Youth suicide is a public health crisis in Maryland. Based on a 2018 survey conducted in Maryland, 22.9% of middle schoolers reported seriously thinking about killing themselves and 18% of high schoolers reported they had seriously considered attempting suicide.ⁱ

Suicide rates are not equal across demographics. The Journal of Community Health reported that the suicide rate among Black females between the ages of 13-19 nearly doubled from 2001-2017.ⁱⁱ During the same time period for Black males ages 13-19, the rate of suicide rose 60%.

Youth Suicide and Firearms Access

Access to firearms is a significant risk factor for adolescent suicides.ⁱⁱⁱ Nationally, between 2015 and 2016, a firearm has been involved in 40% of the over 2,000 annual youth suicides.^{iv} Extensive evidence shows that access to firearms increases the likelihood of death by suicide among youth:

- When a home contains unlocked guns the odds of a child or adolescent dying by firearm suicide is more than **twice** as high as in households where guns are locked.^v
- The risk of suicide by gun is more than **twice** as high in households with loaded guns, as compared to households with unloaded guns.^{vi}

Sound evidence exemplifies the heightened behavioral and public health risks associated with youth access to firearms:

- 85% of suicide attempts with a gun are fatal compared to every other method which has a 5% fatality rate.^{vii}

- 82% of youth under the age of 18 who attempted suicide by gun used a firearm belonging to a family member, usually a parent.^{viii}
- About two-thirds of firearms in homes are stored unlocked.^{ix}
- 75% of children report knowing exactly where firearms are stored in their homes – ultimately risking tragic outcomes.^x

Firearm Deaths by Youth

Maryland’s Child Access Prevention legislation is named “Jaelynn’s Law” in honor of 17-year-old Jaelynn Willey who was killed at Great Mills High School in St. Mary’s County in 2018 when a student in crisis obtained a firearm from a family member. School shootings often imply suicide intentions on the part of the perpetrators, either by themselves or expecting a fatal outcome from authoritative personnel. One of the highest risk factors or warning signs for youth who may be considering a school shooting incident is “access to and experience with weapons” along with indicators such as recent history of violence, past history of violence, history of suicidal behavior and more.^{xi}

Peer-Reviewed Research supports an update to Maryland’s law:

- Estimates suggest that modest increases in the number of American homes safely storing firearms could prevent almost a third of youth gun deaths due to suicide and unintentional firearm injury.^{xii}
- A number of studies over the past 20 years have found that child access prevention laws can reduce suicide and unintentional gun deaths and injuries among children and teens by up to 54% with the greatest reductions occurring in states which require safe storage of firearms.^{xiii}
- A recent study estimated that approximately 100 suicides among 5- to 19-year-olds could be prevented annually if the proportion of unlocked firearms in households with children or adolescents decreased from 50% to 30%.^{xiv}

Conclusion

We ask for a favorable report. If more information would be helpful, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

i

<https://health.maryland.gov/bha/suicideprevention/Documents/2020%20Maryland%20State%20Suicide%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>

ii [The Changing Characteristics of African-American Adolescent Suicides, 2001-2017 | Request PDF \(researchgate.net\)](#)

iii <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/risk/#:~:text=Twelve%20or%20more%20U.S.%20case,live%20in%20homes%20with%20guns.&text=Firearm%20access%20was%20a%20risk,for%20both%20males%20and%20females.>

iv <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2019-01-17/youth-suicide-rates-higher-in-states-with-more-gun-ownership>

v <https://www.srkd.org/research/access-firearms-increases-child-and-adolescent-suicide>

vi <https://www.srkd.org/research/access-firearms-increases-child-and-adolescent-suicide>

vii <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/risk/>

viii <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/youth-access/#:~:text=Source%20of%20Firearms%20in%20Youth%20Suicides&text=An%20NVISS%20study%20of%20firearm,family%20member%2C%20usually%20a%20parent.>

ix <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/youth-access/>

x <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/research/areas-of-research/center-for-injury-research-and-policy/injury-topics/general/gun-safety>

xi <http://jaapl.org/content/jaapl/36/4/544.full.pdf>

xii <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/safe-storage/>

xiii 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. See also, Peter Cummings, David C. Grossman, Frederick P. Rivara, and Thomas D. Koepsell, “State Gun Safe Storage Laws and Child Mortality Due to Firearms,” *JAMA* 278, no. 13 (1997): 1084–1086; Daniel W. Webster, Jon S. Vernick, April M. Zeoli, and Jennifer A. Manganello, “Association Between Youth–focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides,” *JAMA* 292, no. 5 (2004): 594–601; Jeffrey DeSimone, Sara Markowitz, and Jing Xu, “Child Access Prevention Laws and Nonfatal Gun Injuries,” *Southern Economic Journal* 80, no. 1 (2013): 5–25.

xiv <https://www.srkd.org/research/access-firearms-increases-child-and-adolescent-suicide/#:~:text=A%20recent%20study%20estimated%20that,case%20today%2C%20to%2030%25.>

Please join Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence &
National Association of Social Workers – Maryland Chapter
in Support of Child Access Prevention Legislation
in the 2022 Maryland General Assembly

American Academy of Pediatrics – Maryland Chapter
American College of Emergency Physicians – Maryland Chapter
Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Behavioral Health Systems
City of Takoma Park
Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland
Disability Rights Maryland
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LifeBridge Health
Maryland Academy of Advanced Practice Clinicians
Maryland Assembly of School-Based Health Care
Maryland Association of Youth Service Bureaus
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Maryland Clinical Social Work Coalition
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