



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

February 15, 2023

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: SB 858 – Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law) – Letter of Support with Amendments

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) respectfully submits this letter of support with amendments for SB 858 – Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law). SB 858 modifies the requirements for storing a firearm to prevent unsupervised access to a firearm by a minor and an individual who is prohibited from possessing a firearm. This bill will also require the Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services to develop a youth suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide.

Firearms are present in 18% to 64% of US households. Use of gun safety devices and safe storage practices are effective public health prevention strategies. A large share of unintentional firearm fatalities occur in states where gun owners are more likely to store their firearms loaded or even loaded and unlocked. Interventions aimed at keeping firearms locked, unloaded, and stored separately from ammunition are associated with fewer unintentional firearm deaths and firearm suicides.

MDH supports suicide prevention initiatives. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data indicates that guns drove the increase in all suicides. Specifically from 2019 to 2021, the suicide rate increased by 10%, while the non-gun suicide rate decreased by 8%.¹ Recognizing this, MDH supports establishing a stakeholder advisory committee to make recommendations regarding the development of the youth suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide.

SB 858 specifically tasks the Deputy Secretary of Public Health Services to establish the advisory committee and develop the youth suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide by January 1, 2024. While Public Health Services includes the Center for Injury and Violence Prevention, the Maryland Suicide Prevention Program lies within the Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), which also staffs the Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention. To promote collaboration and inclusion of the various programs with expertise in suicide prevention and unintentional injury, MDH suggests amending the bill to: (1) task the responsibilities to the

¹ <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/new-analysis-guns-drove-the-increases-in-homicides-and-suicides-from-2019-to-2021>

Secretary of Health or designee rather than specifically the Deputy Secretary of Public Health Services to allow for greater flexibility and (2) modify the January 1, 2024 development date for the youth suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide to June 30, 2024 to allow adequate time for the stakeholder group to meet and develop a useful guide.

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Megan Peters, Acting Director of Governmental Affairs at megan.peters@maryland.gov or (410) 260-3190.

Sincerely,



Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

MDH Amendments

SB 858 – Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law)

First Reader

On page 4, lines 25-26, strike “January 1, 2024, the Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services” and replace with “June 30, 2024, the Secretary of Health or designee”

On page 6, line 14, strike “Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services” and replace with “Secretary of Health or designee”

On page 6, line 26-27, strike “Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services” and replace with “Secretary of Health”