

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 858
Jaelynn's Bill: Safe Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Jen Pauliukonis, MPH

February 21, 2023

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the committee,

I am the Policy and Programming Director at The Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions conducts and translates rigorous research to inform effective policy solutions, and develops, advocates for, and defends equitable and innovative policies and programs. My testimony is offered by me as an individual and does not represent the views of Johns Hopkins University. **I urge the committee to support Senate Bill 858: Jaelynn's Law for Safe Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention.**

The research is clear: safe gun storage saves lives. Child access prevention (CAP) laws can reduce gun deaths and injuries resulting from suicide, interpersonal violence, and unintentional shootings for youth. Strong, negligence-based CAP laws have been associated with lower rates of hospitalization for pediatric firearm injuries than states with weak CAP laws.ⁱ CAP laws have also been associated with a 26% decrease in nonfatal gun injuries for minors and lower rates of teen suicide by firearm.^{ii,iii} Also, an investigation found that 80% of school shooter from 1999-2018 obtained the gun they used in the shooting from their home or the home of a friend.^{iv} Safe and secure gun storage practices prevent those who cannot legally have guns, potential thieves, and individuals within the household including children and those at elevated risk of suicide or other types of violence, from accessing guns.

This evidence is supported by not only the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, but other respected research institutions across the country. In fact, in the RAND Corporation's recent annual review of all academic studies related to firearm violence, they concluded that there is strong evidence supporting the efficacy of child access prevention laws. In their comprehensive literature review, they found that child access prevention laws may reduce unintentional firearms injuries and death and firearm homicides among youth.^v They also found that child access prevention laws could decrease the total number of suicides among youth.^{vi}

Additionally, the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions has conducted public opinion polling for decades showing widespread support for policies related to safe storage and child access prevention.^{vii}

Maryland experienced 915 gun deaths in 2021 according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and 72 of those killed were children and teens 19 and under. **Firearms were the leading cause of death for youth ages 1-19 years of age.**^{viii} Enacting Senate Bill 858 could have a significant impact on these numbers; numbers that represent real children and real families.

Maryland has adopted several measures to address child access prevention but there are important gaps in the law that would make it more effective. Senate Bill 858 does just that. The

bill expands current law to include safe storage requirement for all minors, not just those under the age of 16. Additionally, the bill creates a criminal misdemeanor penalty for three different levels of crimes related to access.

While I support the bill, I recommend the following changes to make the bill even stronger and more equitable. First, we recommend reducing the two penalties associated with access to ensure fairness and mitigate any potential disparities in sentencing:

- Reduce d(2) from up to 2 years imprisonment and fine not exceeding \$2500 to **up to 6 months imprisonment and a fine not exceeding \$1500.**
- Reduce d(3) from up to 3 years imprisonment and a fine not exceeding \$5,000 to **up to 1 year imprisonment and a fine not exceeding \$3,000.**

Finally, we recommend that a state agency collect data on the arrests and criminal penalties resulting from the law available for analysis to determine if racial disparities occur.

I urge all the members of the committee to support Senate Bill 858.

Thank you,

Jen Pauliukonis

ⁱ Hamilton EC, Miller CC 3rd, Cox CS Jr, Lally KP, Austin MT. "Variability of child access prevention laws and pediatric firearm injuries". *J Trauma Acute Care Surg.* 2018 Apr;84(4):613-619.

ⁱⁱ, DeSimone, Jeffrey, Markowitz, Sara, Xu, Jing. "Child Access Prevention Laws and Nonfatal Gun Injuries". *Southern Economic Journal.* 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Webster, Daniel, Vernick, Jon, Zeoli, April. "Association Between Youth-Focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicide". *JAMA.* 2004.

^{iv} Cox, John Woodrow, Rich, Steve. "The Gun's Not in the Closet". *Washington Post.* 1 August 2018.

^v The Science of Gun Policy: A Critical Synthesis of Research Evidence on the Effects on Gun Policies in the United States. The RAND Corporation. 2018. Updated 2023.

^{vi} The Science of Gun Policy: A Critical Synthesis of Research Evidence on the Effects on Gun Policies in the United States. The RAND Corporation. 2018. Updated 2023.

^{vii} Barry CL, Stone, E, Crifasi CK, Vernick JS, Webster DW, McGinty EE. "Trends in Public Opinion on US Gun Laws: Majorities of Gun Owners and Non-Gun Owners Support a Range of Measures". *Health Affairs.* 2019.

^{viii} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics. About Underlying Cause of Death. 1999-2021.