

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

My name is Eileen Zeller and I live in Clarksville, Howard County, in District 9.

I am submitting this testimony as a volunteer for the Maryland Chapter of Moms Demand Action, and as someone who retired after a career in suicide prevention and public health. In retirement, I also chair the Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention and am on the board of the Mental Health Association of Maryland. But for this testimony, I’m speaking as a Moms volunteer.

I support SB858 because it would raise awareness about secure storage, and can reduce youth suicide by helping parents remove the deadliest method available to their children.

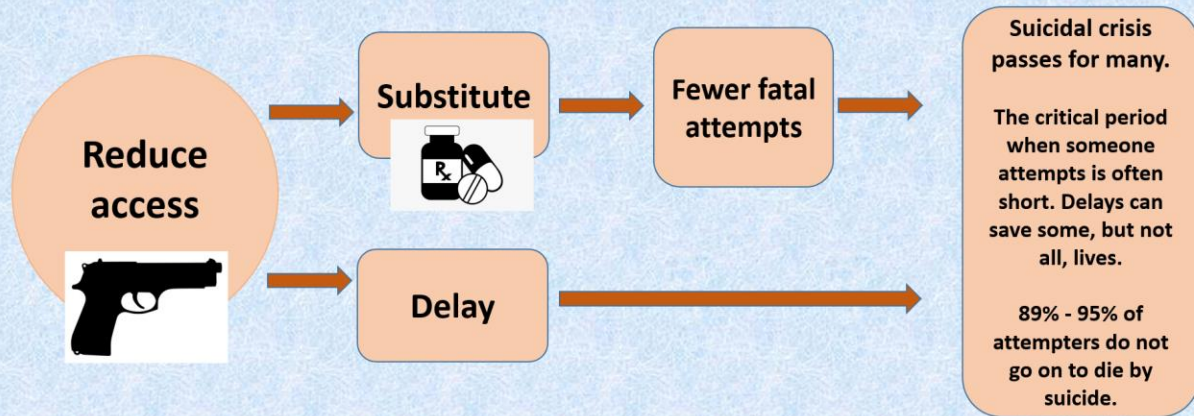
Research consistently shows higher suicide rates among people who live in homes with a firearm. That is not because gunowners and their families are more suicidal—it’s because if they become suicidal, they have access to an extremely lethal way to kill themselves.

Some people take their lives after careful planning and deliberation. But for many others, suicide attempts are impulsive acts, driven by temporary life crises. Studies that interview people who survive suicide attempts report that—although they may have considered suicide days, weeks, and months before the attempt—the actual decision to kill themselves was made hours or in as little as 5 minutes before the attempt. This is especially true for adolescents. The method they can get their hands on during that brief period can be the difference between life and death.

If parents prevent access to a firearm during that brief period of impulsivity, they can prevent the attempt, or drastically reduce the lethality of the attempt and the chance that their child will ever go on to die by suicide. (See evidence-based graphic below.)

OVER

Means Reduction Model



Adapted from: Barber CW & Miller MJ. (2014). [Reducing a suicidal person's access to lethal means of suicide: A research agenda](#). *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*.

No parent should ever have to go through that agony. But between 2016 and 2020, 178 Maryland adolescents (age 10 – 19) died by suicide. Those families will never recover. We need to educate parents to help them keep their children safe. I believe SB 858 will help do that.

I ask for a favorable report on SB 858.

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