

**House Judiciary Committee
March 30, 2023
Senate Bill 858: Firearm Safety - Storage Requirements and
Youth Suicide Prevention
Jaelynn's Law**

*****SUPPORT*****

On behalf of Maryland's Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-MD), we ask you to support Senate Bill 858 - Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn's Law). Suicide has been a growing public health crisis for many years and according to the CDC, suicide rates have increased from 1999 to 2019¹. Even more concerning is a 2016 study that found more than 40% of youth (13-17) suicides were the result of a firearm². Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, one in five teens in Maryland have considered suicide³. Given these troubling statistics, social workers are committed to supporting policies to prevent suicide.

What SB 858 does is specify that a firearm must be locked in homes with youth up to the age of 18, so adults must ensure 16 and 17 year old's also do not have access. It also requires gun owners to insure prohibited persons (e.g. those with protective orders) do not have access to firearms. The bill in no way interferes with the right to own guns.

Just as importantly, the bill requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to convene a workgroup and create a guide for families on safe storage practices that can be used by schools and other organizations to distribute. The bill includes a \$1 million appropriation to support outreach and engagement by MDH on this issue.

Social workers are frequently behavioral health providers for youth experiencing severe mental health crises. When youth report suicidal ideation, social workers assess the suicidal intent, plans, and means to determine risk. Safety planning includes minimizing youths' access to deadly weapons through proper storage of firearms. SB 858 provides clear guidance for how to do that, and the Youth Suicide Prevention and Firearm Safe Storage Guide will publicize that guidance.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

² Crifasi, CK, et al., "Storage Practices of Gun Owners in 2016. *American Journal of Public Health Association*. April 2018: 532-37.

³ <https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/Maryland-Department-of-Health-launches-Youth-Suicide-Prevention-Toolkit-and-MD-Young-Minds-progra.aspx>

Suicide is preventable and SB 858 will decrease youth's risk for suicide by limiting access to loaded guns. SB 858 also requires a much-needed information guide to make safety guidance explicit for families and public resources.

Suicide prevention is critical to save lives and decrease the number of preventable deaths amongst young people. As the greatest provider of behavioral health care in the country, social workers stand ready to participate in the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. We ask you to support SB 858.