



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY  
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
ON FEBRUARY 7, 2024  
BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE  
REGARDING HB0416 – CROSS-FILED WITH: SB0432  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS - ACTIVE SHOOTER SAFETY DRILLS OR TRAININGS –  
REQUIREMENTS**

**SUPPORT**

Honorable Chair Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary and Vice Chair Delegate Jheanelle K. Wilkins, and distinguished members of House Ways and Means Committee:

The Critical Issues Forum: *Advocacy for Social Justice* (CIF), provides this testimony in support of Public Schools - Active Shooter Safety Drills - Requirements - HB 416, sponsored by Delegates Solomon and Atterbeary. Responding to the need for children to learn in a safe and secure environment, this legislation provides essential requirements related to the conduct of active shooter safety drills to promote the safety of school children that are developmentally and age-appropriate. The bill also requires advance notification to parents, mental health follow-up for students and school personnel, and data collection to evaluate the effectiveness and psychological consequences of the safety drills and training and improve it as needed. The legislation also calls for the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) to develop model content to inform parents of the State's firearm storage laws.

Composed of Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, CIF is a coalition of synagogues that include over 1,750 families and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. CIF is a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues that relate to our shared values, including the Jewish tradition's emphasis on the primary value of human life. Saving lives and preventing gun violence is a top priority.

Tragically, every day, nearly 20 children are injured and killed by guns in this country. This is a public health emergency that is preventable using thoughtful, evidence-based clinical and public health approaches that employ informed cross-sectoral primary prevention, preparedness, and intervention efforts. It is an appalling statistic that firearms are the leading cause of death in children and youth ages 1 to 21 in Maryland and the United States, surpassing

injuries and death from motor vehicle crashes.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, deaths by suicide and homicide, particularly from firearms, increase with age. In Maryland, 131 children and teens died by gun violence in 2021. This was more than twice the number of deaths from motor vehicle crashes.<sup>2</sup> Thirteen percent (16%) of the firearm deaths in Maryland were by suicide, and 84% were homicides.<sup>3</sup> It is outrageous and intolerable that gun violence is now the leading cause of death for our children.

To help keep children safe, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), representing 67,000 pediatricians, has called for stronger common-sense firearm legislation, including strengthening background checks, supporting effective extreme risk protection orders, encouraging safe firearm storage, banning assault weapons, and addressing firearm trafficking and school shootings.<sup>4</sup> Tragically there are more than 135 firearm related deaths that occur on average each day in the US, including those from mass shootings. The severe consequences of this uniquely American epidemic sadly extend far beyond the dead and wounded, their surviving families and members of their communities.

In 1975, *The New York Times* published an article entitled, “Violence in Schools Now Seen as Norm Across the Nation.”<sup>5</sup> Nearly 50 years later, according to an article published in *The Washington Post* on 3/29/2023, there have been 376 school shootings since the Columbine High School massacre in 1999.<sup>6</sup> In 2024, the nightmare continues unabated feeding parents and teachers’ and school administrators’ fears. According to an article in *Education Week* published in January 2024, “There have been 6 school shootings this year that resulted in injuries or deaths, according to an *Education Week* analysis. There have been 188 such shootings since 2018. There were 38 school shootings with injuries or deaths last year. There were 51 in 2022, 35 in 2021, 10 in 2020, and 24 each in 2019 and 2018.”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to research from the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, “Students exposed to school shootings face 'lasting, persistent adversity in their educational and long-term economic outcomes...[they] have higher rates of school absenteeism, lower high school and college graduation rates, and earn lower incomes by their mid-twenties.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CDC Wisqars On-line Causes of Injury-Related Death Data Base, Violence-related Firearm Deaths; Both Sexes; Age Range: 1 – 21; All Races and Ethnicity; US and Maryland; 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/gun-violence-prevention/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/06/14/archives/violence-in-schools-now-seen-as-norm-across-the-nation.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/school-shootings-database/>

<sup>7</sup> School Shootings This Year: How Many and Where (2024, January 4). *Education Week*. Retrieved Month Day, Year from <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/school-shootings-this-year-how-many-and-where/2024/01>

<sup>8</sup> Trauma at School: The Impacts of Shootings on Students' Human Capital and Economic Outcomes Marika Cabral, Bokyoung Kim, Maya Rossin-Slater, Molly Schnell, and Hannes Schwandt NBER Working Paper No. 28311 December 2020, Revised May 2022 JEL No. I24,I31,J13

The AAP and we fully recognize the profoundly traumatizing consequences of all of the firearm bloodshed in our country including “increasing concerns about the risk of mass casualty events in schools throughout the United States.”<sup>9</sup> The AAP recommends that children and adolescents be included in exercises and drills to advance readiness and preparedness in the same manner that fire safety or weather related threats are handled. However, the drills must be planned and conducted in a manner that is developmentally appropriate and thoughtfully attending to the potential emotional impact of participation that are evidence-based with guidance from experts. This is especially true for younger children, those who have experienced trauma in the past, and children with special health care needs. The AAP Policy Statement on “Participation of Children and Adolescents in Live Crisis Drills and Exercises” makes 11 evidence-based recommendations consistent with the provisions in Delegates Solomon and Atterbeary’s bill.<sup>10</sup> There is a litany of literature to establish and maintain a healthy school climate for learning and in support of the AAP findings and recommendations.<sup>11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17</sup> HB0416 also follows the guidance provided by the US Department of Education’s *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*.<sup>18</sup>

While HB 416 also requires advance notification to parents, and mental health follow-up it also requires the Maryland Center on School Safety to analyze data on the effectiveness and consequences of active shooter drills. Assessment of the impact of the drills is critical to gain a real understating of the risks and benefits of drills. Because of a deep sense of fear, although school shootings are rare, active shooter drills are implemented in over 95 percent of American K–12 schools today.<sup>19</sup> While there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of drills due in part

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<sup>9</sup> Schonfeld DJ, Melzer-Lange M, Hashikawa AN, Gorski PA; Council on Children and Disasters, Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention, Council on School Health. Participation of Children and Adolescents in Live Crisis Drills and Exercises. *Pediatrics*. 2020 Sep;146(3):e2020015503. doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-015503. PMID: 32839245

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Heath, M. A.; et al.: History of School Safety and Psychological First Aid for Children. *Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention*. Oxford Journals. Volume 7, Number 3. Pages 206-223. 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Zullig, K; et al: School Climate: Historical Review, Instrument Development, and School Assessment. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*. 28(2) 139–152. © 2010 SAGE Publications

<sup>13</sup> ElSherief, M; et al: Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00993-6>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/blog/gun-violence/17-facts-about-gun-violence-and-school-shootings/>

<sup>15</sup> How Lockdown Drills Affect America’s Children? <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/03/us/school-shooting-lockdown-drills/>

<sup>16</sup> Moore-Petinak, N; et al.: Active Shooter Drills in the United States: A National Study of Youth Experiences and Perceptions. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 67 (2020) 509e513. June 2, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Brock, M; Kriger, N; Miró, M.: School Safety Policies and Programs Administered by the U.S. Federal Government: 1990–2016. Office of Justice Programs’ National Criminal Justice Reference Service.2018.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students, *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*, Washington, DC, 2013. <https://rems.ed.gov/REMSPublications.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> The Impact of Active Shooter Drills in Schools. Report of Everytown Research & Policy. 2023. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills-in-schools/>

to methodological challenges, clear descriptions of the elements of the drills, e.g. student ages, intensity of drill, police involvement, frequency, duration, etc., the drills may be traumatic and harmful to mental health.<sup>20</sup> “Active shooter drills in schools are associated with increases in depression (39%), stress and anxiety (42%), and physiological health problems (23%) overall, including children from as young as five years old up to high schoolers, their parents, and teachers.”<sup>21, 22</sup> All of this underscores the import of HB 416 call for scientific analysis about evidence and consequence, especially unintended consequences of active shooter drills to students of various developmental ages, teachers, and parents, as well as law enforcement.

HB 416 also calls for the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) to develop model content on the State’s safe gun storage laws, which will be sent home annually by schools. The AAP reports that about one-third of American children live in homes with firearms and 43% of those households have at least one unlocked firearm. Thirteen percent (13%) of households with guns contain at least one firearm that is unlocked and loaded or stored with ammunition. Tragically, suicide attempts involving a lethal firearm are nearly always fatal (91%) compared with those involving drug overdoses (23%). The increased risk of suicide is particularly striking for younger persons where guns are stored loaded and/or unlocked.<sup>23</sup>

Marylanders, like so many other Americans, are struggling with staggering loss, isolation, and the resultant mental health impacts resulting from the COVID19 pandemic. Properly securing firearms prevents access to lethal weapons and the likelihood of unintentional firearm injury, death by suicide, and interpersonal / domestic violence. Maryland's Child Firearm Access Prevention laws focus on storing firearms securely, while still allowing gun owners reasonable access to them when needed.

HB 416 provisions are particularly important given the increased gun sales in Maryland—a more than 76% increase in the first 11 months of 2020 over 2019 as evidenced by FBI background investigations.<sup>24</sup> Gun sales in January 2021 compared to January 2020 increased by 134 percent.<sup>25</sup> A significant portion of those gun purchases, 40%, were first-time gun owners who may or may not know about the best safe storage practices.<sup>26</sup>

A 2017 study concluded that, “Pediatric firearm injuries and deaths are an important public health problem in the United States contributing substantially each year to premature death,

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<sup>20</sup> ibid

<sup>21</sup> ibid

<sup>22</sup> Zhu, R; et al.: The impact of security countermeasures on human behavior during active shooter Incidents. Scientific Reports | (2022) 12:929 | <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-04922-8>. [www.nature.com/scientificreports](http://www.nature.com/scientificreports).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/state-advocacy/safe-storage-of-firearms/>

<sup>24</sup> Rising gun sales put more lives at risk | COMMENTARY; Baltimore Sun Editorial Board; Baltimore Sun; Dec 07, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/02/03/gun-sales-january-background-checks/>

<sup>26</sup> Background Checks. A Metric for Gun Sales, Hit All-time High, Baltimore Sun, July1, 2020.

illness, and disability of children.”<sup>27</sup> The study authors found that “most children who died of unintentional firearm injuries were shot by another child in their own age range and most often in the context of playing with a gun or showing it to others...children are curious about firearms and will touch a firearm even when instructed not to do so, which points to the importance of adult supervision and the need to store firearms safely and out of the reach of children.”<sup>9</sup>

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that household firearms be stored safely, less than one in three households with children follow this guidance.<sup>28</sup> Yet the research literature demonstrates that adherence to these guidelines by safely storing firearms can significantly reduce adolescent and young adult injuries and deaths. This study concluded that youth suicides could decline substantially if only an additional 20% of gun owning households began safely storing their firearms. A 1997 study concluded that the first 12 state laws limiting child access to firearms resulted in a 23% lower than expected number of unintentional firearm-related deaths.<sup>29</sup> A later study found that these laws were associated with a 10.8% reduction in firearm suicides overall and an 11.1% reduction in suicide rates for older youth age 18-20.<sup>30</sup> As this study noted, these “laws may encourage gun owners... [with young children] to adopt safe practices that endure” after their children are older, and “may increase awareness and change social norms to encourage gun owners to secure firearms...” In short, these laws can save our children’s lives.

Maryland’s leaders understood the great importance of preventing firearm access to young people when they passed our State’s current law. Now, the straightforward amendments in Jaelynn’s Law strengthen these provisions and make that law consistent with other Maryland Laws and laws in other states that require safe storage for homes with children. Further, raising the safe storage age will send an important message that storing lethal firearms safely is critical. Safe storage of medications, alcohol, and toxic materials, as well as pool fences and securing children in car safety seats and seatbelts, has saved the lives of children! Indeed, we use two mechanisms – door and ignition, to unlock our automobiles and start our cars. Securing lethal weapons safely should be no different. It is feasible, inexpensive, non-compromising and simply makes good sense. Using a biometric / pin code to open a gun safe only takes seconds similar to dialing 911 on a smartphone.

Given the increasing risk of death by suicide involving a firearm, HB 416 smartly calls for the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) in consultation with the Department of State Police, to develop and distribute model content regarding the State’s firearm storage laws. This

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<sup>27</sup> Fowler KA, Dahlberg LL, Haileuesus T, et al. Childhood Firearm Injuries in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2017; 140(1): e20163486.

<sup>28</sup> Monuteaux, Michael C., et al. Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage with Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths, *JAMA Pediatrics* , 2019; 173(7):657-662. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.

<sup>29</sup> Cummings P, Grossman DC, Rivara FP, Koepsell TD. State gun safe storage laws and child mortality due to firearms. *JAMA*. 1997; 278: 1084-1086.

<sup>30</sup> Webster, Daniel W., et al. “Association Between Youth-Focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides.” *JAMA*, 2004; 292: 594. doi:10.1001/jama.292.5.594

provision is consistent with the recently issued White House Actions to Promote Safe Storage of Firearms to take preventive action by securing firearms.<sup>31</sup> We support this provision as safe storage laws are effective. Scientific evidence from an evaluation of over 200 combinations of policies and outcomes conclusively demonstrated that “child-access prevention laws, or safe storage laws, reduce self-inflicted fatal or nonfatal firearm injuries — including unintentional and intentional self-injuries — among youth. Evidence also supports the conclusions that such laws reduce firearm homicides among youth.”<sup>32</sup>

In 1853, the outcry from the first recorded school shooting indicated “that there’s another possible way to view the hierarchy of American rights—one in which the right not to get shot [and suffer the accompanying trauma] is on par with, and may even outweigh, the right to freely carry a gun and use it.”<sup>33</sup> Sesame Street as does HB 416 offers thoughtful ways to help children and families deal with “Traumatic Experiences: First Steps to Hope.”<sup>34</sup>

In summary, HB 416 offers a comprehensive approach to enhance the safety of children in public schools, aligning with evidence-based practices and addressing critical issues related to active shooter drills and firearm safety. The CIF urges the committee to produce a favorable report supporting both the House Bill 416 (and the cross-filed Senate version SB 432) keep our children safe while learning and not adding to the trauma and nightmare of school shootings in America.

Nothing can be more important!

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<sup>31</sup> White House Announces New Actions to Promote Safe Storage of Firearms.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/01/25/white-house-announces-new-actions-to-promote-safe-storage-of-firearms/>

<sup>32</sup> Smart, Rosanna, Andrew R. Morral, Rajeev Ramchand, Amanda Charbonneau, Jhacova Williams, Sierra Smucker, Samantha Cherney, and Lea Xenakis, *The Science of Gun Policy: A Critical Synthesis of Research Evidence on the Effects of Gun Policies in the United States*, Third Edition, RAND Corporation, RR-A243-4, 2023. As of February 1, 2023: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR-A243-4.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR-A243-4.html)

<sup>33</sup> Cornell, S.: *The Lessons of a School Shooting—in 1853. How a now-forgotten classroom murder inflamed the national gun argument.* Politico. March 24, 2018

<sup>34</sup>Being There: Helping Families Through Traumatic Experiences *SesameStreetInCommunities .org*