

SB 577 – Public Safety – Distribution of Literature to Purchasers of Firearms and Ammunition

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 7, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of SB 577.

SB 577 would require the Maryland Department of Health to prepare informational literature relating to firearms and ammunition, for distribution to purchasers of firearms and ammunition. The literature provided is to include information on a variety of topics, including firearm safety, suicide prevention and mental health awareness.

Suicide deaths by firearms have been increasing. The annual firearm suicide rate in the United States increased approximately 11% from 2019-2022 – the highest documented level since at least 1968.¹ Black, Indigenous, and Latinx populations have seen especially dramatic increases in suicide by firearm. While gun homicides are highlighted in the media, nearly 60% of gun deaths in the United States are suicides, not homicides.²

One part of this trend has been a dramatic increase in youth suicide over the last decade, often with the use of a firearm. Suicide deaths of 12-17-year-olds increased by 47.7% between 2011 and 2021,³ and data from 2020 shows that firearms were used in 48% of suicides of 15–19-year-olds, and 38% of suicides of 10–14-year-olds.⁴ In these instances, overwhelmingly youth used the firearm of a family member.⁵

¹ Kaczowski . et al. Notes from the field: firearm suicide rates by race and ethnicity – United States, 2019-2022. CDC. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (December 2023).

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7248a3.htm>

² Everytown Research analysis of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. WONDER Online Database, Provisional Mortality Statistics, Multiple Cause of Death. Average: 2019 to 2023.

<https://www.everytown.org/issues/gun-suicide/>

³ Heather Sanders and Nirmita Panchel. A look at the latest suicide data and change over the last decade. (August, 2023).

<https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/a-look-at-the-latest-suicide-data-and-change-over-the-last-decade/>

⁴ Apurva Bhatt et.al. Rising rates of adolescent firearm suicide and the clinicians role in addressing firearms. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (June, 2024).

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36007812/>

⁵ Catherine Barber et.al. Who owned the gun in firearm suicides of men, women, and youth in five US states? Preventive Medicine (November 2022).

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35461957/>

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Because of the strong correlation between suicide and access to a gun, any person who purchases a firearm should be provided with information about mental health resources. Especially critical is information about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, which provides 24/7 support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Additionally, because of the risk of a youth accessing a family member's firearm, information on proper firearm storage, including Maryland's laws on firearm storage, must be included.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 577 and urges a favorable report.