



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 636 - Public Safety - Access to Firearms - Storage Requirements

TO: Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Stephen C. Buckingham, Chair, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.

DATE: February 19, 2020

I am here today because gun violence is a moral issue and a religious problem. It is a moral issue because the suffering of innocents is defined as an evil, and people of faith are required to confront evil. It is a religious problem because faith groups and their clergy are repeatedly called upon to respond to and alleviate the suffering of the innocent.

We always hear that suffering victims and their families deserve our “thoughts and prayers.” But where humans can control the harm that firearms can cause, we should take steps to prevent this harm whenever and wherever possible. Our scriptures may not speak with one voice about why suffering happens, but they are unanimous in commanding people of faith to actively respond to that human suffering.

As the natural consequence of our compassionate response to human suffering, we are called to seek ways to reduce this suffering by supporting preventive measures, laws to keep guns out of the hands of people who can misuse them, including children who can use lethal weapons to harm themselves or others, whether intentionally or accidentally. For this reason, we support HB 636 which further limits access to firearms by minors. It clarifies that that a person must not store a loaded or unloaded firearm where the person knew or should have known that an unsupervised minor could gain access, and uses the uniform definition of “minor” (under 18) rather than a special definition of “child” (under 16).

We cannot prevent natural disasters, so when hurricanes and tornadoes happen, the best we can do is send aid. But human behavior is responsive to concerted action. When negligence or malevolence causes the deaths of children – in schoolrooms, on city streets, and in homes – we can and must take action both to heal and to stop it. A church that did nothing in the face of innocent suffering wouldn't be worthy of the name.

The measure before you today is another tool for law enforcement to protect the people from gun violence. We urge a favorable report.

Stephen C. Buckingham

Lay Community Minister and Chair
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland