



HB 636- SUPPORT
Child Access Prevention Public Safety - Access to Firearms - Storage
Requirements

Karen Herren, JD, Director of Legislative Affairs
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence
February 19, 2020

Dear Chairman Clippenger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and members of the Committee,

Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence is a local, grassroots organization dedicated to reducing gun deaths and injuries throughout the state of Maryland, with a particular focus on reducing urban gun violence and gun suicide. **We urge the committee to vote FAVORABLY on Senate Bill 646/House Bill 636 to strengthen Maryland's law governing a child's access to firearms.**

The Giffords Law Center reports that fewer than 1 in 3 US homes with youth and firearms follow the American Academy of Pediatrics' recommendations to store all household firearms locked and unloaded. This means that more than 1.7 million youth live in households with firearms stored in a manner inconsistent with these safety guidelines. Gun owning parents are often misinformed about the risks associated with unsafe gun storage practices. Guided by literature and materials sponsored by gun manufacturers touting the use of firearms for safety and protection, well-meaning parents bringing a firearm into the home under this pretext of safety have statistically just placed their family at more risk.

Accidental gun deaths occur mainly in those under 25 years of age. In 2014, 2,549 children (age 0-19) died by gunshot. An additional 13,576 were injured. Meanwhile victims use guns for self-defense in less than 1% of contact crimes. Victims using a gun are no less likely to be injured after taking protective actions than victims using other forms of protective action. Self-defense gun use does not appear to be uniquely beneficial in reducing the likelihood of injury or property loss. On the contrary, a gun in the home is linked to higher rates of death and injury from firearms including increased risks of accidents, violent domestic altercations, and suicide. In other words, the risk to children of an unsecured weapon in the home is much greater than the alleged risks associated with a lack of quick access to a firearm for the purpose

of self defense. We must look to mediating the inherent risks of having firearms in homes with children.

Safer storage of firearms may help reduce youth and even young adult suicides. Firearms are a sadly effective method of attempting and completing suicide. Behavioral characteristics associated with adolescence, such as impulsivity, feelings of invincibility, and curiosity about firearms make this a particularly important age to protect. The sensible strategies set forth in this piece of legislation provide much needed protection while respecting the right to own and possess a firearm. **MPGV urges the committee to vote FAVORABLY on SB 646/HB 636 to strengthen Maryland's law governing a child's access to firearms.**