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The Maryland House of Delegates
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Testimony of Delegate Dana Stein in Support of House Bill 636

Public Safety – Access to Firearms – Storage Requirements

Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

There is much debate on how to reduce gun violence in our schools—including arming teachers and security guards, better mental health treatment, metal detectors, etc. Another important way to reduce gun violence in schools is to reduce access to guns among young people. Data shows that if youth did not have access to guns, more than two-thirds of past gun violence in schools could have been prevented.¹

This bill, HB 636, addresses weaknesses in Maryland’s current law on firearm storage so as to better protect children. This bill requires all firearms, loaded or unloaded, to be stored in a location where an unsupervised minor under the age of 18 could not get access. The penalties are differentiated based on the impact of a violation, so that if a minor gets access and causes harm to the minor or another person, the penalty is higher than if no one is injured.

¹ John Woodrow Cox and Steven Rich, “The Gun’s Not in the Closet,” *Washington Post*, August 1, 2018. “. . . thousands of children have used unlocked pistols, shotguns and rifles to kill themselves or accidentally shoot others. And they’ve wielded them again and again to target classmates.”

I have amendments that address the concern that the bill would prohibit minors who are certified to hunt by DNR from being able to hunt alone. The amendments ensure that youth who have a hunter safety certificate and have parental consent can access a rifle for the purpose of hunting. The group Hunters of Maryland is on board with these amendments.

In August 2018, a 2-year-old in Halethorpe, MD, accidentally shot himself in the head and later died after accessing his uncle's unsecured gun. In June 2019, a 16-year-old in Maryland accidentally shot himself while riding a school bus. In July 2018, a 17-year-old accidentally shot himself in a private residence.

And, in March 2018, a 17-year-old student gained access to his father's firearm and shot and killed 16-year-old Jaelynn Willey and injured another 14-year-old student at Great Mills High School in Southern Maryland. That tragic event was one of 116 school shootings nationwide in 2018, the highest number of school shootings ever, with 114 deaths or injuries—also the highest ever.² This bill has been named to honor Jaelynn.

The Center for Homeland Defense and Security at the Naval Postgraduate School, tracks every instance nationwide in which a gun is visible or fired in a school—whether or not there are injuries. It reports that between 2016 and 2019, there were 103 school incidents with guns nationwide involving youth aged 7 through 18 who had gotten access to a gun; last year, there were 25 incidents nationwide involving youth between the ages of 11 and 18.³

The *Washington Post* found in 2018 that since 1999, shooters in at least 145 acts of gun violence in primary and secondary schools were under the age of 18. In 105 school shootings by juveniles in which the source of the weapon could be determined, 84 of the firearms used were taken from the child's home or from those of relatives or friends. In only 4 of those cases was the adult owner of the weapon criminally punished.⁴

An even deadlier issue for youth under 18 is gun-related suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-24 year olds nationally and the second

² Ibid. <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/incidents-by-age-of-shooter-2/>

³ Center for Homeland and Defense Security, "K-12 School Shooting Database," <https://www.chds.us/ssdb/incidents-by-year/>

⁴ Cox and Rich, 2018.

cause of death in the same age group in Maryland.⁵ A 2016 study found that in suicides by adolescents (ages 13 to 17), a firearm was used 42% of the time. The same study found that states with child-access prevention laws that require guns to be stored in a safe manner have lower rates of adolescent gun suicide.⁶

By requiring that firearms, loaded or unloaded, not be stored or left in a location where a minor could gain access, it is likely that we will reduce suicides, school shootings, and accidental shootings by and of our youth.

I encourage this committee to vote favorably for this legislation.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control, “Ten Leading Causes of Death By Age Group, 2017.” https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/pdf/leading_causes_of_death_by_age_group_2016-508.pdf ; see also MSDE Youth Suicide Prevention School Program, (everytownresearch.org/everystat) (<http://marylandpublicschools.org/about/Pages/DSFSS/SSSP/Suicide/index.aspx>)

⁶ Crifasi, CK, et al., “Storage Practices of Gun Owners in 2016. *American Journal of Public Health Association*. April 2018: 532-37.