



## **Volunteer Testimony**

**HB 636- SUPPORT**

**Child Access Prevention Public Safety - Access to Firearms - Storage Requirements**

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District 20  
House Judiciary  
February 19, 2020**

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

I support strengthening Maryland's Child Access Prevention laws through HB 636 and SB 646, because evidence tell us that: "Guidance alone, such as that offered by the American Academy of Pediatrics, has fallen short." (Azreal, Cohen, Salhi; Urban Health, 2018)

Gun safety, in addition to all other home safe practices, is a priority of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Extrapolating from national data, approximately 70% of children living in Maryland in families with gun-owners may be at-risk for experiencing injuries and trauma directly or indirectly from firearm- related suicide, unintentional injuries, and domestic homicides--all preventable by safer gun storage practices.

The specific risk varies by geographic location: The increased likelihood of death by suicide in rural areas of Maryland may be explained by males' preferences for and easy access to firearms; while the increased risk of non-domestic homicides in Baltimore and other urban areas may be explained by access to illegally obtained guns. Safer storage of guns could help to reduce the toll of gun violence in all of our communities.

Nationwide, at least one gun is present in one out of three homes with or without children under the age of 18 years. Of U.S. gun owners with children in their homes, only 30% store them in the safest manner (unloaded and locked); while 20% store them in the least safe manner (loaded and unlocked), exposing 7% of US children in the latter category (~4.6 million) to greatest excess risk for death or injuries due to firearms.

Simply providing information about procedures and devices, such as University of Michigan's "Parent's Guide to Home Firearm Safety," may increase the credibility of pediatricians to gun-owners. However, a clear objective of incorporating counselling routinely in pediatric practice is also to challenge the gun industry's messages about

safety, which may also promote the sale of guns to children or may not promote the AAP's full recommendations for safe gun storage (i.e., to store unloaded guns and ammunition separately in locked safes).

In summary, I believe that our state laws should more effectively encourage gun owners (and sellers) to store guns as if there were children present, keeping all of us safer from gun violence. We can start by helping gun-owning parents to know their responsibilities, and that the consequences of their inattention to gun-safety guidance or laws is that they will be held accountable for the injuries caused by unsupervised children's access to dangerous weapons in their homes.