



Volunteer Testimony

HB 636- SUPPORT

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

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The problem of gun violence in the United States often seems insurmountable. In the ongoing struggle to keep children, specifically, safe from gun violence, action has not been swift and immediate. It requires more effort than a simple formula: the deaths of children by guns = regulation of guns. Those who care have had to take action step by step, making slow, deliberate progress to ensure the safety of our kids. I am grateful to elected representatives in the state of Maryland for your efforts to make change to keep our children safe. We have further to go and an opportunity is here in the Public Safety – Access to Firearms – Storage Requirements bill.

Today, we are not here to talk about mass shootings, we are here to talk about the smaller-scale, still devastating and totally preventable occurrences of kids shooting people. We are here to talk about stopping children from gaining access to guns. Yes, I said preventing CHILDREN from getting their hands on GUNS. As a mother of three young kids, ages 7, 9 and 11, and as a social worker with experience studying human development, I find it hard to believe that we even need to have this discussion. Of course guns should be kept away from children, locked and secured. No parent should have to worry that the end result of a playdate at a peer's home is never seeing their child alive again.

Unintentional shootings by children is a real issue. Since 2015, there have been at least 1660 such incidents (there are likely more because not all are reported). This resulted in 606 deaths and 1098 injuries¹. Six hundred and six families destroyed by death caused by a child having access to a gun. And over a thousand more harmed. People dead and injured. And what about the child who, while playing with a trusted adult's firearm, discharges the fatal shot? Imagine how it feels to a child to be the one who fired the shot that killed your little brother, or hurt your

¹ everytownresearch.org #notanaccident index

best friend. Why wouldn't we adults do everything we can, not just to save lives, but also to prevent children from the psychological damage of causing harm – sometimes irreparable – to another human being?

Suicide is also a significant issue. Adolescents and children experience emotional liability – rapid changes in mood and strong and changing emotions. Some youth struggle with impulsive decision making. When depressed and seeing no way out, young people may attempt to end their lives. “Given that 90% of attempted suicides with guns are successful, how much more frequently will temporarily-depressed youths commit suicide if guns are available?”² It is terrifying to fathom. The presence of firearms means that people whose brains are not fully developed may be forced to face long-term, adult-level consequences from what could have been short-term mistakes. As adults, it is our responsibility to guide our children, yes, and also to help them avoid situations that may cause untold damage to their lives.

The most obvious way we can protect our children is to prevent them from having access to guns. That's it. No gun, no shooting. It is so simple. We can save so many lives and prevent so much suffering. It would be wonderful if just knowing that a loaded or unsecured firearm near children is dangerous was enough to cause adults to secure their weapons. But the statistics show that it isn't. Already in 2020, there have been 26 unintentional shootings by children, resulting in 7 deaths and 20 injuries³ – and it is only February. So, just like laws that require us to wear seat belts and penalize us when we don't, we need laws to encourage adults to store their firearms securely so we can stop kids from getting their hands on guns. Maryland already has some such laws, and now it is a matter of making penalties that are strong enough to change people's behaviors. We truly have to do whatever it takes.

The Talmud, an important Jewish theological text, tells us that if you have saved one life, it is as if you have saved the whole world. Is your child's life worth making the effort to store your weapons safely? Mine sure are. Everyone's children's lives are worth it. If penalties for allowing kids to get their hands on guns that could injure them and possibly end their lives is what it takes to encourage adults to do right by kids, than such penalties are necessary. We need this bill, even if it saves only one life. Research shows us that it can save many more. According to information from the federal National Emergency Department Sample data set, “approximately 12,706 nonfatal gun injuries are sustained by America's children and teens every year...roughly one in 13 firearm deaths occurs among children and teens, one in six gun injuries is among people under the age of 20. Approximately every 40 minutes, a child or teenager is wounded with a gun.”⁴

It is our responsibility, as Maryland's adults, to protect Maryland's children. Unfortunately, there is no way to insulate our children from all harm. So why wouldn't we do what we can to protect

² No Gun Left Behind; The Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, May 2007

³ [everytownresearch.org #notanaccident index](https://www.everytownresearch.org/notanaccident/index)

⁴ [Everytownresearch.org Protecting Kids and Communities A More Complete Picture: The Contours of Gun Injury in the United States](https://www.everytownresearch.org/protecting-kids-and-communities-a-more-complete-picture-the-contours-of-gun-injury-in-the-united-states)

them from having access to deadly weapons in homes, which should be safe spaces for play and exploration? Why would we set them up for scenarios that may rob them of their innocence, and, perhaps, their lives? Today we have an opportunity to move forward on the long path to ending gun violence. It is a small but significant step. Please vote in favor of HB 636/SB 646. In doing so, you will save a child's life.