

Testimony in Support of Jaelynn’s Law/Child Access Prevention and Safe Storage (SB 479)

By Mindy Landau, Maryland State Executive Committee, Brady United Against Gun Violence

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the passage of Jaelynn’s Law, SB 479, which will strengthen safe storage requirements for gun owners for the purpose of reducing child access to firearms.

Every year in the United States, nearly 40,000 people are killed and 90,000 people are injured by gun violence. As we at Brady call it, “family fire,” accounts for a majority of these terrible tragedies. Family fire is a shooting involving an improperly stored or misused gun found in the home that results in death or injury. Unintentional shootings, suicides and intention shootings are all forms of family fire. Every day, 8 children and teens are unintentionally injured or killed due to family fire -- **every day!** This is especially alarming because it’s so preventable. While the majority of gun owners do adhere to safe storage practices, the sad truth is, 4.6 million children live in homes with access to an unlocked or unsupervised gun. Hundreds of children's lives could be saved each year if an additional 20 percent of gun owners with children stored their guns securely.

Sadly, studies show that firearms are used in approximately 40 percent of suicides among children, and roughly 5% of the 23,000 annual suicides by firearms are minors under the age of 18 (calculated using data from CDC, 2019). Additional studies show that in more than three-fourths of youth suicides for which firearm storage practices could be identified, the gun used by the child had been stored loaded and unlocked. And studies of adolescent and adult suicides have found that those who died by firearm suicide lived in homes where guns were less securely stored.

First time gun owners, who make up a large part of the number of gun purchases over the past year, are at greater risk because they have not had access to proper training. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent panic buying that occurred throughout 2020, there are new thousands of new gun owners in Maryland, many of whom may not have knowledge on how to properly use, handle, clean and store guns, increasing the risk of unintentional shootings.

By raising the minimum age of unsupervised firearms possession to 18 years of age, ensuring that guns are not stored where a minor could gain access, and providing for a graduated system of penalties commensurate with the harm cause by a failure to securely store a weapon, this bill will strengthen gun owners’ accountability and responsibility for the safe storage of firearms. For these reasons, Brady Maryland unequivocally supports the passage of SB479.