



February 24, 2021

The Honorable Luke Clippinger
House Judiciary Committee
Room 101, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support – HB 200: Public Safety - Access to Firearms - Storage Requirements (Jaelynn's Law)

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strives through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1000 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

MPS and WPS support House Bill 200: Public Safety - Access to Firearms - Storage Requirements (Jaelynn's Law) (HB 200), which strengthens firearms storage requirements to keep children safe. I am a child and adolescent psychiatrist and assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University.

By nature, adolescents are in a stage where their emotional regulation is not mature enough to handle certain social stressors. Adolescents are highly vulnerable to their peers' influence and opinions; and their ability to communicate how they feel is often overwhelmed by their emotions. The part of an adolescent's brain that controls our impulses and allows for planning and sequencing and fully understanding our actions' consequences is not entirely developed until their mid-twenties. This explains why young people are the ones who commit most of the violence and the ones who are victims of violence most frequently across a person's lifespan. Additionally, violence typically starts in the late teens through early twenties across settings.

The leading causes of death among youth ages fifteen (15) to twenty-four (24) continue to be unintentional injury and homicide, accounting for 34.2% and 32.9%, respectively, of all deaths. These deaths are followed by suicide (9.9%). Additionally, a percentage of unintentional injuries is caused by poor gun storage practices.

Suicide among teens and young adults has nearly tripled since the 1940s. Among the risk factors is easy access to lethal means, and one of the ways to prevent suicide is the restriction of access to lethal means. Studies suggest that the peak age of onset for having depressive-like symptoms is fourteen (14) to fifteen (15) years of age and the majority of individuals who develop depression experience their first clinically significant episode during the transition from middle to late adolescence (i.e., ages fifteen (15) to eighteen (18) years of age). For all these reasons, adolescents and



young adults are a very vulnerable population for self-inflicted injuries and outward aggression, and guns are a quick and dangerous way to bring their impulses to completion.¹

MPS and WPS members often encounter well-meaning families who believe that educating their children about the risk of guns is enough. It is not. They often think that hiding the gun unlocked in some part of the house, or keeping the gun in an open bag or closet after a short talk about the risks of using a gun inappropriately will be enough. All children and adolescents with or without mental health diagnoses struggle regulating their emotions and impulses and when an acute stressor affects them, they often don't have the ability to pause and think. When our members have a suicidal patient, the first thing they try to control is access to lethal means. Our members ask their parents to lock away the pills, put away sharps, and also lock up the guns, but unfortunately what ultimately happens in the home is uncontrollable and the advice provided can quickly be undone with an easily accessible gun. The many recent suicide-homicide mass shootings that have taken place across our nation and in Maryland schools are just a new manifestation of the problem of inappropriate storage of guns by the parents.

MPS and WPS strongly urge you to support HB 200 for it would save the lives of young people by suicide, homicide and unintentional injury. For all the reasons above, MPS and WPS ask the committee for a favorable report of HB 200.

If you have any questions with regard to this testimony, please feel free to contact Thomas Tompsett Jr. at tommy.tompsett@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Joint Legislative Action Committee

¹ **References**

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