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HB 659

February 23, 2022

TO: Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Natasha Mehu, Director, Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 659 - Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn’s Law)

POSITION: Support

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 659.

HB 659 strengthens Maryland’s current law which prohibits an individual from leaving a loaded firearm in a location where the person should have known an unsupervised child would gain access to the firearm. The penalty for violating the current law is a misdemeanor with a maximum \$1,000 fine. House Bill 659 requires that firearms be stored unloaded and in a secure manner, creates a three-tiered penalty system, and requires the State Department of Health to develop relevant public education materials.

Unsafely stored firearms are a major source of weapons used by children and teenagers to commit violence against themselves and others. Approximately 4.6 million US children live in homes where at least one firearm is stored unlocked and loaded.¹ According to a survey of parents who own guns, only one in three households safely store all firearms, regardless of whether a child in the home has a history of depression, ADHD, or other mental health conditions.² This is especially alarming since four-fifths of adolescent firearm suicides take place in the young person’s home.³

¹ Azrael, D., Cohen, J., Salhi, C. et al. (2018). Firearm Storage in Gun-Owning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey. *Journal of Urban Health*

² Scott J, Azrael D, Miller M. (2018). Firearm Storage in Homes with Children with Self-Harm Risk Factors. *Pediatrics*

³ Johnson RM, Barber C, Azrael D, Clark DE, Hemenway D. (2010). Who are the Owners of Firearms Used in Adolescent Suicides? *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*

Storing a gun locked and unloaded while keeping ammunition in a separate locked location is associated with a reduction in firearm injuries in homes with children. A 2020 review of gun policies by RAND Corporation found that child access prevention policies are amongst the most effective laws to prevent gun violence.⁴ This thorough evaluation found that child access prevention laws are associated with a decrease in suicides, unintentional injuries and deaths, and violent crime. Furthermore, the RAND report found that these laws are not associated with any increases in gun violence.

A 2019 study estimates that if an additional 20% of gun owners with children safely stored their firearms, hundreds of children's lives could be saved each year.⁵ We cannot wait until Congress passes a federal child access prevention law with a felony penalty that holds gun owners accountable for safely storing firearms. House Bill 659 will help keep guns out of children's hands and prevent suicides and unintentional shootings.

We respectfully request a **favorable** report on HB 659.

⁴ RAND. (2020) The Effects of Child-Access Prevention Laws. rand.org

⁵ Monuteaux, M. C., D. Azrael, and M. Miller. (2019). Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage with Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths. *JAMA Pediatrics*