

**House Bill 659 Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention  
(Jaelynn’s Law)  
Judiciary Committee  
February 23, 2022  
Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present testimony in support of House Bill 659.

HB 659 establishes additional requirements for firearm storage to prevent access to unsupervised minors. It also requires Public Health Services at the Maryland Department of Health to develop a Youth Suicide Prevention and Firearm Safe Storage guide for families, health and social services providers, and others interested in youth suicide prevention.

The 2018 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey reported 22.9% of Maryland’s middle school students had seriously thought about killing themselves, with higher rates among female students and students of color. Additionally, 18% of Maryland’s high school students had seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months. Suicide rates are consistently higher amongst LGBTQ youth, black youth, and individuals who have interacted with the juvenile justice and child welfare system.<sup>1</sup>

In 2019, suicide was the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for ages 10-34, 35.40% of firearm deaths were suicides, and 40.79% of all suicides were by firearms.<sup>2</sup> A National Violent Injury Statistics System (NVISS) study across four states and two years found 82% of firearm suicides among youths ages 17 and younger used a firearm belonging to a family member. An additional study found among gun-owning parents who believed their child had never handled their firearm, 22% of the children said that they had.<sup>3</sup> Firearms are the most common method of suicide in the United States, and access to a firearm triples the risk of death by suicide.<sup>1</sup>

Access to an unsecured firearm elevates suicide risk for all members of the household. With increased gun ownership in Maryland during the COVID-19 pandemic, additional safety requirements and access to critical suicide prevention information are necessary to prevent future deaths by suicide among Maryland’s youth. For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 659 and urges a favorable report.

---

<sup>1</sup>Governor’s Commission on Suicide Prevention (2020), <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/suicideprevention/Documents/2020%20Maryland%20State%20Suicide%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (2021), <https://aws-fetch.s3.amazonaws.com/state-fact-sheets/2021/2021-state-fact-sheets-maryland.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Harvard School of Public Health, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/youth-access/>