



**TESTIMONY OF THE CIF OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES JUDICIARY COMMITTEE REGARDING
HOUSE BILL 659 - FIREARM SAFETY – STORAGE REQUIREMENTS AND YOUTH SUICIDE
PREVENTION (JAELYNN’S LAW)**

FAVORABLE

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger, Vice-Chair David Moon, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

The Critical Issues Forum: Advocacy for Social Justice (CIF) supports the “Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn’s Law)” (HB 659). CIF is a coalition of three synagogues, Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, with over 1750 households that serves as a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on issues that concern the sanctity and primacy of human life. We urge the House of Delegates to pass HB 659 to strengthen current firearm and ammunition storage requirements. In memory of Jaelynn Willey, a 16 year old student at Great Mills High School murdered by a 17 year old classmate who used an unsecured Glock handgun legally owned by his father, HB 659 amends and significantly improves the law by:

1. Requiring that firearms be stored safely and unloaded;
2. Raising the age where guns must be secured from unsupervised young people from 15 to 17;
3. Imposing liability when a responsible person “knew or reasonably should have known that an unsupervised minor is likely to gain access to the firearm”;
4. Including graduated penalties for failing to safely store a firearm that increase based on whether a child gains access and if harm is caused; and,
5. Requiring the Maryland State Department of Health to develop and disseminate a Youth Suicide Prevention and Firearm Safe Storage Guide.

These commonsense modifications to Maryland’s current law for the safe storage of firearms will further protect our State’s youth and their parents from needless tragedy, by preventing unintentional firearm injury, death by suicide and firearm theft. These amendments are particularly important given the increased gun sales in Maryland with an estimated 40% first time gun owners who may not know about the importance of and requirements for safe secure storage practices for firearms.

Safe and secure storage of firearms and ammunition is especially important for children and youth, while still allowing gun owners reasonable access to them. “Pediatric firearm injuries and deaths are an important public health problem in the United States contributing

substantially each year to premature death, illness, and disability of children.”¹ The findings indicated that, “most children who died of unintentional firearm injuries were shot by another child in their own age range and most often in the context of playing with a gun or showing it to others. Children are curious by nature and will touch a firearm even when instructed not to do so, underscoring the importance of adult supervision and the need to store firearms safely out of the reach of children. A landmark study concluded that the first 12 state laws limiting child access to firearms resulted in 23% lower than expected unintentional firearm-related deaths.² Child access prevention laws nationally are associated with a 17% reduction in firearm-related homicides committed by juveniles.³

Marylanders, like so many Americans, are struggling with staggering loss, isolation, and the resultant mental health impacts resulting from the COVID19 pandemic. Properly securing firearms prevents access to weapons and the likelihood of unintentional firearm injury, death by suicide, and firearm theft. We are particularly pleased to support the new provision that directs the Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services to develop a youth suicide prevention and firearm safe storage guide to educate the public and firearm owners about the vulnerability of children and youth and best practices for firearm and ammunition storage.

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that household firearms be stored safely, fewer than 1 in 3 households with children follow this guidance.⁴ Adherence to the AAP safe storage guidelines for firearms significantly reduces adolescent injuries and deaths: youth suicides could decline substantially if only an additional 20% of gun owning households began safely storing their firearms;⁴ a later study found confirmed that these laws were associated with a 10.8% reduction in firearm suicides overall and an 11.1% reduction in suicide rates for older youth age 18-20.⁵ As this study noted, these “laws may encourage gun owners . . . [with young children] to adopt safe practices that endure” after their children are older, and “may increase awareness and change social norms to encourage gun owners to secure firearms”

As parents, grandparents, neighbors, and citizens of Maryland, we urge the Committee to support HB 659 and prevent firearm tragedies by strengthening existing child access to firearms prevention provisions. Maryland leaders understood the great importance of preventing firearm access to young people when they passed the current safety provisions. These straightforward amendments are consistent with Maryland and other State firearm laws across the country. Common sense will save the lives of Maryland children!

The Critical Issues Forum requests that the Committee favorably refer HB 659.

¹ Fowler KA, Dahlberg LL, Haileuesus T, et al. Childhood Firearm Injuries in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2017;140(1): e20163486.

² Cummings P, Grossman DC, Rivara FP, Koepsell TD. State gun safe storage laws and child mortality due to firearms. *JAMA*. 1997;278:1084-1086.

³ Anderson DM, Sabia JJ, & Tekin E. Child access prevention laws and juvenile firearm-related homicides. *Journal of Urban Economics*, Volume 126, November 2021.

⁴ Monuteaux, Michael C., et al. Association of Increased Safe Household Firearm Storage with Firearm Suicide and Unintentional Death Among US Youths, *JAMA Pediatrics*, 2019;173(7):657-662. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1078.

⁵ Webster, Daniel W., et al. “Association Between Youth-Focused Firearm Laws and Youth Suicides.” *JAMA*, 2004;292:594. doi:10.1001/jama.292.5.594