



MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIC CLUB

P.O. Box 34047, Bethesda, MD 20827

www.womensdemocraticclub.org

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

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony concerning an important priority of the **Montgomery County Women's Democratic Club (WDC)** for the 2022 legislative session. WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Clubs in our County with hundreds of politically active women and men, including many elected officials.

WDC urges the passage of HB0659. According to a November 2021 report by the Children's Safety Network:

- Firearm suicides are the fourth leading cause of injury death for children ages 10-19.
- Approximately nine children and adolescents ages 10-19 die by firearm each day in the United States; three of those deaths are suicide-related firearm injury.
- Firearm injury suicide death rates increased by 6.3% per year on average between 2010 and 2019.

In a 2019 study published in [JAMA Pediatrics](#), the authors said "it is estimated that 6% to 32% of youth firearm deaths (by suicide and unintentional firearm injury) could be prevented, depending on the probability that an intervention motivates adults who currently do not lock all household firearms to instead lock all guns in their home."

This is the fifth time Delegate Dana Stein has proposed legislation to restrict a minor's access to a firearm, dating back to 2013, when he introduced a bill after the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. That was nine years ago. We can only speculate how many children's lives would have been saved if the legislature had passed restrictions in 2013. Perhaps Jaelynn Willey would still be with us?

It is common sense that children's lives can be saved if we prevent access to firearms. It has been more difficult than it should be to pass a law penalizing those who are careless about their weapons, and therefore lead to the injury and death of innocent children. We have a moral duty to recognize that it is more important to prevent children's deaths from firearms than it is to protect the rights of careless gun owners who refuse to abide by safe gun practices. Just like the freedom to drive a car and to own a home require certain responsibilities of auto and homeowners, gun owners must be required to take full responsibility for the storage of their firearms. Otherwise, senseless tragedy can ensue -- which it does, time and time again.



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Many will argue that there are storage laws on the books in Maryland, and therefore, we do not need further restrictions that would punish brazenly negligent parents. However, our current storage laws only require an external safety lock attached to handguns to prevent accidental discharge. The issue is that children, particularly late middle school and high school students, can still access these weapons. Per the Giffords organization, Maryland currently does not require firearm owners to lock up their weapons and that is the most important aspect of safe storage laws that Maryland is missing.

Creating a stringent law that imposes liability on irresponsible parents is a powerful "stick" and that is just what we need to ensure safe storage compliance. To quote New Mexico State Senator Daniel Ivey-Soto, "A law without penalties is simply a suggestion." We hope that our Maryland legislators, who have proposed and passed excellent common-sense legislation for years, will elevate **this** incredibly important issue this year and vote to protect Maryland's children - including children you know and love - from future injury and death.

We ask for your support for HB0659 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.

Respectfully,

Leslie Milano
President