

Judiciary Committee
Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 659
Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn’s Law)

On behalf of Maryland’s Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW-MD), we ask you to support House Bill 659 - Firearm Safety – Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention (Jaelynn’s Law). Suicide has been a growing public health crisis for many years and according to the CDC, suicide rates have increased from 1999 to 2019¹. Even more concerning is a 2016 study that found more than 40% of youth (13-17) suicides were the result of a firearm². Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, one in five teens in Maryland have considered suicide³. Given these troubling statistics, social workers are committed to supporting policies to prevent suicide.

What HB659 does is spell out safety precautions for firearms in the homes of minors to limit access and protect children from impulsive and deadly acts. An advisory council will develop a guide that provides those safety requirements as well as articulate the consequences of unsafe practices. The bill in no way interferes with the right to own guns.

Social workers are frequently behavioral health providers for youth experiencing severe mental health crises. When youth report suicidal ideation, social workers assess the suicidal intent, plans, and means to determine risk. Safety planning includes minimizing youths’ access to deadly weapons through proper storage of firearms. SB659 provides clear guidance for how to do that, and the Youth Suicide Prevention and Firearm Safe Storage Guide will publicize that guidance.

Suicide is preventable and HB659 will decrease youth’s risk for suicide by limiting access to loaded guns. HB659 also requires a much-needed information guide to make safety guidance explicit for families and public resources.

Suicide prevention is critical to save lives and decrease the number of preventable deaths amongst young people. As the greatest provider of behavioral health care in the country, social workers stand ready to participate in the Stakeholder Advisory Committee. We ask you to support HB 659.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

² Crifasi, CK, et al., “Storage Practices of Gun Owners in 2016. *American Journal of Public Health Association*. April 2018: 532-37.

³ <https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/Maryland-Department-of-Health-launches-Youth-Suicide-Prevention-Toolkit-and-MD-Young-Minds-progra.aspx>