



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY  
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND  
ON APRIL 4, 2023  
BEFORE THE MARYLAND SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY,  
AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
REGARDING HB0515 –  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS - ACTIVE SHOOTER SAFETY DRILLS OR TRAININGS - REQUIREMENTS  
FAVORABLE**

Honorable Chair Senator Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair Senator Cheryl C. Kagan and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

The Critical Issues Forum: *Advocacy for Social Justice* (CIF), provides this testimony in support of Public Schools - Active Shooter Safety Drills – Requirements - HB 515. This legislation provides essential requirements related to the conduct of active shooter safety drills to promote the safety of school children that are developmentally and age-appropriate. The bill also requires advance notification to parents, mental health follow-up for students and school personnel, and data collection to evaluate effectiveness of the safety drill policy and improve it as needed. The legislation also calls for the development of model content to inform parents of the State’s firearm storage laws.

Composed of Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, CIF is a coalition of synagogues that include over 1,750 families and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. CIF is a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues that relate to our shared values, including the Jewish tradition’s emphasis on the primary value of human life. Gun violence prevention is a top priority.

Firearms are the leading cause of death in children and youth ages 1 to 21 in Maryland and the United States, surpassing injuries and death from motor vehicle crashes.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, deaths by suicide and homicide, particularly from firearms, increase with age. In Maryland, 135 children and teens died by gun violence in 2020. This was more than twice the number of deaths from motor vehicle crashes.<sup>2</sup> Thirteen percent (13%) of the firearm deaths in Maryland were by suicide and 87% were homicides.<sup>3</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup> CDC Wisqars On-line Causes of Injury-Related Death Data Base, Violence-related Firearm Deaths; Both Sexes; Age Range: <1 – 21; All Races and Ethnicity; US and Maryland; 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

outrageous and intolerable that gun violence is now the leading cause of death for our children.

To help keep children safe, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), representing 67,000 pediatricians, has called for stronger common-sense firearm legislation, including strengthening background checks, supporting effective extreme risk protection orders, encouraging safe firearm storage, banning assault weapons, and addressing firearm trafficking and school shootings.<sup>4</sup> Tragically there are more than 120 firearm related deaths that occur on average each day in the US, including those from mass shootings. The severe consequences of this uniquely American epidemic sadly extend far beyond the dead and wounded, their surviving families and members of their communities.

In 1975, The New York Times published an article entitled, “Violence in Schools Now Seen as Norm Across the Nation.”<sup>5</sup> Nearly 50 years later, according to an article published in The Washington Post on 3/29/2023, there have been 376 school shootings since the Columbine High School massacre in 1999. The most recent school shooting was just over a week ago at The Covenant School in Nashville, Tennessee with three 9 year old children murdered and three school personnel. There were 180 children present in school that day bearing witness to the violence or cringing behind locked doors to hide from the nightmare.<sup>6</sup>

The AAP and we fully recognize the profoundly traumatizing consequences of all of the firearm bloodshed in our country including “increasing concerns about the risk of mass casualty events in schools throughout the United States.”<sup>7</sup> The AAP recommends that children and adolescents be included in exercises and drills to advance readiness and preparedness in the same manor that fire safety or weather related threats are handled. However, the drills must be planned and conducted in a manner that is developmentally appropriate and thoughtfully attending to the potential emotional impact of participation that are evidence-based with guidance from experts. This is especially true for younger children, those who have experienced trauma in the past, and children with special health care needs. The AAP Policy Statement on “Participation of Children and Adolescents in Live Crisis Drills and Exercises” makes 11 evidence-based recommendations consistent with the provisions in Delegate Solomon’s bill.<sup>8</sup> There is a

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/gun-violence-prevention/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/06/14/archives/violence-in-schools-now-seen-as-norm-across-the-nation.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/interactive/school-shootings-database/>

<sup>7</sup> Schonfeld DJ, Melzer-Lange M, Hashikawa AN, Gorski PA; Council on Children and Disasters, Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention, Council on School Health. Participation of Children and Adolescents in Live Crisis Drills and Exercises. *Pediatrics*. 2020 Sep;146(3):e2020015503. doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-015503. PMID: 32839245

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

litany of literature to establish and maintain a healthy school climate for learning and in support of the AAP findings and recommendations.<sup>9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16</sup>

While HB 515 also requires advance notification to parents, mental health follow-up, and data collection, it also requires the Maryland Center on School Safety and the State Police to develop model content on the state's safe gun storage laws, which will be sent home annually by schools. The AAP reports that about one-third of American children live in homes with firearms and 43% of those households have at least 1 unlocked firearm. Thirteen percent (13%) of households with guns contain at least 1 firearm that is unlocked and loaded or stored with ammunition. Tragically, suicide attempts involving a lethal firearm are nearly always fatal (91%) compared with those involving drug overdoses (23%). The increased risk of suicide is particularly striking for younger persons where guns are stored loaded and/or unlocked.<sup>17</sup>

Marylanders, like so many other Americans, are struggling with staggering loss, isolation, and the resultant mental health impacts resulting from the COVID19 pandemic. Properly securing firearms prevents access to lethal weapons and the likelihood of unintentional firearm injury, death by suicide, and interpersonal / domestic violence. Maryland's Child Firearm Access Prevention laws focus on storing firearms securely, while still allowing gun owners reasonable access to them when needed.

HB 515 provisions are particularly important given the increased gun sales in Maryland—a more than 76% increase in the first 11 months of 2020 over 2019 as evidenced by FBI background investigations.<sup>18</sup> Gun sales of January 2021 compared to January 2020 increased by 134 percent.<sup>19</sup> A significant portion of those gun purchases,

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<sup>9</sup> Heath, M. A.; et al.: History of School Safety and Psychological First Aid for Children. Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention. Oxford Journals. Volume 7, Number 3. Pages 206-223. 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Zullig, K; et al: School Climate: Historical Review, Instrument Development, and School Assessment. Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment. 28(2) 139–152. © 2010 SAGE Publications

<sup>11</sup> ElSherief, M; et al: Impacts of school shooter drills on the psychological well-being of American K-12 school communities: a social media study. Humanities and Social Sciences Communications. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00993-6>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/blog/gun-violence/17-facts-about-gun-violence-and-school-shootings/>

<sup>13</sup> How Lockdown Drills Affect America's Children? <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/03/us/school-shooting-lockdown-drills/>

<sup>14</sup> Moore-Petinak, N; et al.: Active Shooter Drills in the United States: A National Study of Youth Experiences and Perceptions. Journal of Adolescent Health 67 (2020) 509e513. June 2, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Brock, M; Kriger, N; Miró, M.: School Safety Policies and Programs Administered by the U.S. Federal Government: 1990–2016. Office of Justice Programs' National Criminal Justice Reference Service.2018.

<sup>16</sup> The Impact of Active Shooter Drills in Schools: Time to Rethink Reactive School Safety Strategies. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-impact-of-active-shooter-drills-in-schools/> February 20, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/state-advocacy/safe-storage-of-firearms/>

<sup>18</sup> Rising gun sales put more lives at risk | COMMENTARY; Baltimore Sun Editorial Board; Baltimore Sun; Dec 07, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/02/03/gun-sales-january-background-checks/>

40%, were first time gun owners who may or may not know about the best safe storage practices.<sup>20</sup>

A 2017 study concluded: “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.”<sup>21</sup> The study authors found 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 about firearms and will touch a firearm even when instructed not to do so, which points to the importance of adult supervision and the need to store firearms safely and out of the reach of children.”<sup>9</sup>

Although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that household firearms be stored safely, fewer than 1 in 3 households with children follow this guidance.<sup>22</sup> Yet the research literature demonstrates that adherence to these guidelines by safely storing firearms can significantly reduce adolescent and young adult injuries and deaths. This study concluded that youth suicides could decline substantially if only an additional 20% of gun owning households began safely storing their firearms. A 1997 study concluded that the first 12 state laws limiting child access to firearms resulted in a 23% lower than expected number of unintentional firearm-related deaths.<sup>23</sup> A later study found 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.<sup>24</sup> 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...” In short, these laws can save our children’s lives.

Maryland’s leaders understood the great importance of preventing firearm access to young people when they passed our state’s current law. Now, the straightforward amendments in Jaelynn’s Law will make that law consistent with other Maryland Laws and laws in other states that require safe storage for homes with children. Further, raising the safe storage age will send an important message that storing lethal firearms safely is critical. Safe storage of medications, alcohol, toxic materials, building pool fences and securing children in car safety seats and or with seatbelts practiced diligently by parents has saved the lives of children! Securing lethal weapons safely should be no different. It is feasible, inexpensive, non-compromising and simply makes good sense. Using a biometric / pin code to open a gun safe only takes seconds similar to dialing 911 on a smartphone.

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<sup>20</sup> Background Checks. A Metric for Gun Sales, Hit All-time High, Baltimore Sun, July1, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Fowler KA, Dahlberg LL, Haileuesus T, et al. Childhood Firearm Injuries in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2017; 140(1): e20163486.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> Cummings P, Grossman DC, Rivara FP, Koepsell TD. State gun safe storage laws and child mortality due to firearms. *JAMA*. 1997; 278: 1084-1086.

<sup>24</sup> 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

Given the increasing risk of death by suicide involving a firearm, HB 515 smartly calls for the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS) in consultation with the Department of State Police, to develop and distribute model content regarding the State’s firearm storage laws.

We support this provision as safe storage laws are effective. Scientific evidence from an evaluation of over 200 combinations of policies and outcomes conclusively demonstrated that “child-access prevention laws, or safe storage laws, reduce self-inflicted fatal or nonfatal firearm injuries — including unintentional and intentional self-injuries — among youth. Evidence also supports the conclusions that such laws reduce firearm homicides among youth.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1853, the outcry from the first recorded school shooting indicated “that there’s another possible way to view the hierarchy of American rights—one in which the right not to get shot [and suffer the accompanying trauma] is on par with, and may even outweigh, the right to freely carry a gun and use it.”<sup>26</sup> Sesame Street as does HB 515 offers thoughtful ways to help children and families deal with “Traumatic Experiences: First Steps to Hope.”<sup>27</sup>

The CIF urges the committee to produce a favorable report supporting Senate version of House Bill 515 keep our children safe while not adding to the trauma and nightmare of school shootings in America.

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<sup>25</sup> Smart, Rosanna, Andrew R. Morral, Rajeev Ramchand, Amanda Charbonneau, Jhacova Williams, Sierra Smucker, Samantha Cherney, and Lea Xenakis, *The Science of Gun Policy: A Critical Synthesis of Research Evidence on the Effects of Gun Policies in the United States*, Third Edition, RAND Corporation, RR-A243-4, 2023. As of February 1, 2023: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR-A243-4.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR-A243-4.html)

<sup>26</sup> Cornell, S.: *The Lessons of a School Shooting—in 1853. How a now-forgotten classroom murder inflamed the national gun argument.* Politico. March 24, 2018

<sup>27</sup>Being There: Helping Families Through Traumatic Experiences *SesameStreetInCommunities .org*