



**American  
Foundation  
for Suicide  
Prevention**

RE: Favorable on SB 159; Voluntary Do Not Sell Firearms Registry

February 6, 2023

Dear Senator Hettleman,

I am writing in **strong support of SB159** from my perspectives as a board member of the Maryland chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), a licensed psychologist in the state of Maryland, a daughter who lost her beloved mother to suicide, a granddaughter who lost her grandfather to suicide, and a mother who supported her daughter for over ten years with a life threatening mental illness that included suicide attempts. I have also worked for almost ten years as a federal contractor supporting the implementation of evidence-based practices for psychological health in the military health system.

AFSP is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide through research, education, support, and advocacy. As the nation's largest private funder of suicide prevention research, we know that suicide is a leading yet preventable public health problem. AFSP supports the implementation of voluntary removal initiatives including temporary transfer exceptions, community storage options, and Voluntary Do Not Sell Lists as important components of suicide prevention.

Access to lethal means during a suicidal crisis is strongly linked to suicide. Firearms have the highest suicide case fatality rate relative to other commonly used means in the United States, with research indicating that the odds of death in a suicide attempt by firearm are 2.6 times greater than with suffocation, the second most lethal method. Firearms are also the most used method of suicide. Restricting access to firearms has consistently been linked to reduced suicide. For example, a review of 49 studies examining firearm restriction approaches to suicide prevention found that 98 percent of these interventions were superior to the control condition (Mann et al., 2021; American Journal of Psychiatry) and concluded that means restriction approaches, including firearm restriction, were among the four best options considered in their review for preventing suicide.

SB 159 would establish a voluntary do not sell firearm registry for individuals in Maryland to voluntarily and proactively waive the right to purchase or receive a firearm. This decision would be made when in good mental health, thus empowering residents with a history of serious mental illness or a history of prior suicide attempt(s) to protect themselves against future impulsive firearm suicide. How long the individual stays on the registry is up to them, and removal requests would have to be approved promptly. Other states including Washington, Virginia, and Utah have enacted voluntary do not sell lists. I firmly believe that implementing this initiative in our state would help prevent the tragic loss of life to suicide in the future.

Nationally, 45,979 lives were lost to suicide in 2020 and 585 of these deaths were in Maryland (CDC, March 2022). That year in Maryland, 46% of suicide deaths were by firearms, and 33% of all firearms deaths were suicides; suicide was the third leading cause of death for youth and young adults ages 10-34. Young people involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems; LGBTQ individuals; Black, Indigenous, and other people of color; and military Service members and Veterans are at even greater risk of suicide.

Research shows us that putting time and distance between a person at risk and the lethal method can save their life. When people at risk of suicide are unable to access a lethal suicide method, most will not attempt suicide with another method. Temporary restriction of access to a firearm during a time of increased risk gives suicidal individuals something they desperately need: time for the intense suicidal risk to diminish and time for someone to intervene with mental health support and resources. People considering suicide are typically ambivalent about life; part of them wants to live, but part of them is focused on dying to stop the unbearable pain they are experiencing. This bill provides a lifeline to that part of them that wants to live and saves their loved ones and communities from the devastating impact of their suicide.

Sincerely,

Dorothy A. Kaplan, Ph.D.

Board Member, AFSP Maryland; Licensed Psychologist, Maryland