



HOUSE BILL 0307

Firearm Safety-Storage Requirements and Youth Suicide Prevention-Jaelynn's Law

RICH GIBSON, HOWARD COUNTY STATE'S ATTORNEY

POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT

February 13, 2023

My name is Rich Gibson, I am the State's Attorney for Howard County and have been a prosecutor for nineteen years. Part of my obligations as State's Attorney is to advocate for laws that enhance the safety and well-being of our community; that is the reason I am writing today to offer my support for House Bill 0307.

This bill, if passed, will enhance public safety by creating a regulatory structure designed to promote the safe storage of deadly firearms. The combination of an unsupervised minor or a prohibited person and a readily accessible, highly lethal firearm is a catastrophe waiting to happen. It is foreseeable that a young individual lacking an appreciation for the lethality of guns and the potential permanence of the consequences associated with the improper handling and usage of a gun, could make choices with lasting devastating impacts. Moreover, people convicted of disqualifying crimes have previously engaged in an action that displays they are not responsible enough to lawfully possess firearms. Suicides, homicides, and non-fatal shootings are preventable, if we are willing to put in place the proper restrictions to limit access to lethal weapons. This bill goes a long way in furtherance of that goal.

One amendment I suggest to this bill is to make a conviction sustained due to a violation of this law a disqualifying crime under Public Safety Article § 5-101 (g) and punishable under § 5-133. If someone is irresponsible with the storage of firearms and a prohibited person or unsupervised minor gains access to that

weapon that person has displayed a level of irresponsibility that should disqualify them from the future possession of firearms.

One issue that has been raised in advance is whether prosecutors will pursue charges against family members who improperly store weapons and access to those weapons by a minor leads to a self-inflicted injury or suicide. Prosecutors are elected by the local communities they serve because those local communities trust our judgment. We will assess each incident on a case-by-case basis and bring charges where appropriate.

For these reasons, **I respectfully request a favorable report on House Bill 0307 with amendment.**