



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Senator Attar's Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1031 - Criminal Law - Child's Access to Firearms - Penalty (NyKayla Strawder Act)

March 11, 2025

Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

Introduction and Purpose of Senate Bill 1031

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 1031 - *Criminal Law – Child's Access to Firearms – Penalty*, also known as the NyKayla Strawder Act. This bill seeks to address a critical issue in our community by strengthening penalties for individuals who fail to properly secure firearms, preventing minors from gaining unsupervised access. This legislation is named in memory of NyKayla Strawder, a 15-year-old who tragically lost her life a few years ago due to a firearm that was left unsecured. In the wake of recent tragic incidents, including the heartbreaking death of a 9-year-old in my district, this bill aims to improve public safety by ensuring that those who negligently leave firearms accessible to children are held accountable.

The Need for Senate Bill 1031

Currently, Maryland law allows only a fine as a penalty for individuals who store or leave a loaded firearm in a location where a minor could access it without supervision. However, this penalty has proven insufficient, especially given the catastrophic consequences of such negligence. Tragically, incidents like the accidental death of NyKayla Strawder and the recent death of a 9-year-old in my district highlight the urgency of addressing this issue more effectively. These tragedies are preventable, and we must take action to strengthen our laws to protect children from easily accessing firearms.

Key Provisions of Senate Bill 1031

Senate Bill 1031 increases the penalties for individuals who fail to secure firearms from only a fine of up to \$1,000 to include a penalty of up to five years in prison. This bill aims to ensure that those who knowingly or negligently allow minors to gain unsupervised access to firearms are held criminally accountable.

The current law has several exemptions: it will not apply if a minor's access to a firearm is supervised by an adult, if the firearm was obtained because of unlawful entry, if the firearm is in

the possession or control of a law enforcement officer while the officer is engaged in official duties, or if the minor holds a certificate of firearm and hunter safety. These exemptions ensure that the bill does not penalize responsible gun owners who follow safe practices and guidelines.

Request for Support

The Nykayla Strawder Act honors the memory of a young life lost, and I believe it will help prevent future tragedies by sending a strong message about the importance of securing firearms. This legislation is a critical step toward safeguarding the most vulnerable members of our society – our children.

I urge the committee to stand with me, with Nykayla's family, and with the countless Maryland families who are counting on us to make this necessary change to our law. I respectfully ask for your support in passing this important legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dalya", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Senator Dalya Attar