



Date: February 11, 2026

To: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Reference: Senate Bill- 362 Criminal Law - Child's Access to Firearms - Penalty (Ny'Kala Strawder Act)

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 362, which aims to strengthen Maryland's existing Child Access Prevention (CAP) law by increasing accountability for negligent storage of loaded firearms that are accessible to minors. Firearm-related injuries and deaths remain a critical public health issue affecting Maryland's children and adolescents. According to the latest state gun violence data, firearms were the *leading cause of death among young people ages 1–17* in Maryland, with 45 youth firearm deaths reported in 2023 alone. State health department sources confirm that firearms contribute substantially to both unintentional and intentional injuries and deaths among youth, including *firearm suicide and homicide*, and that firearms account for a significant portion of emergency department visits for injury related to violence.

National research and injury prevention data consistently show that unsupervised access to loaded firearms in the home dramatically increases the risk of fatal and nonfatal shootings among children and teens, including *accidental shootings, suicides, and homicides*. Moreover, studies indicate that many adolescents report knowing where unsecured household firearms are kept — even when parents believe otherwise — underscoring the gap between perception and actual storage security.

A growing body of peer-reviewed research confirms that CAP and safe storage laws that impose criminal liability on negligent firearm storage are associated with meaningful reductions in youth firearm suicide and unintentional injury. For example, states with such laws that require firearms to be stored unloaded and locked saw reductions in youth firearm suicide rates and other firearm injuries. Policies that make adults accountable for securing firearms are effective *public health tools* because they encourage safe storage practices and reduce access for at-risk youth.

While Maryland's current law prohibits knowingly storing a loaded firearm accessible to an unsupervised minor, SB 362 will strengthen enforcement by increasing the statutory penalties for violations. Increasing accountability benefits public health by:

- Reinforcing the seriousness of safe firearm storage in households where children live or visit;
- Providing clearer deterrence and prosecutorial authority to address negligent storage before a tragedy occurs;
- Aligning Maryland's statute with evidence-based injury prevention strategies shown to reduce youth firearm deaths and injuries.

Complementing this statute with continued public education on safe storage — such as secure locking devices, locked safes, and separate storage of ammunition — will further enhance its protective impact. For Maryland's children and families, strengthened CAP provisions are not just good policy — they are a necessary public health intervention. For these reasons, the Center for Hope and LifeBridge Health urges a favorable report on SB 362.

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