



Testimony in Support of HB1123
Criminal Law - Minor's Access to Firearms – Penalty
Judiciary
March 11, 2026
FAVORABLE

Free State PTA (FSPTA) represents over 70,000 volunteer members and families in over 500 public schools. As the state's premier and largest child advocacy organization, Free State PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. **We are offering a favorable testimony in support of House Bill 1123.**

This legislation takes a measured and responsible step to strengthen Maryland's safe storage laws by increasing the penalty for leaving a loaded firearm where an unsupervised minor can access it. Research shows that approximately 4.6 million American children live in homes with guns that are not stored securely, and **firearms are now the leading cause of death** among children in the United States. 350 children unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else when they find unlocked, loaded guns. Nearly 700 American children die by gun suicide each year. One study shows that over 80 percent of children under the age of 18 who died by gun suicide used a gun belonging to a family member. By holding adults accountable when they knew or should have known that a child could gain access to a loaded firearm, this bill reinforces a clear and commonsense expectation: firearms must be stored safely to prevent avoidable tragedies. Children are naturally curious, so the responsibility for safe gun storage should ALWAYS fall on the adult in the household, not the child. In fact, talking to children about guns is a precaution, not a guarantee of safety. One study shows that over 40% of adolescents in gun-owning households report having "easy access" to the guns in their home.

Importantly, the measure preserves reasonable exceptions for supervised access, lawful hunting and safety training, unlawful entry, and law enforcement duties, demonstrating a balanced approach that **respects lawful gun ownership** while prioritizing child safety. The enhanced penalty reflects the serious and potentially deadly consequences that can result from unsecured firearms, serving both as a deterrent and as a statement of our commitment to protecting children and communities. House Bill 1123 promotes responsible firearm storage, supports public safety, and helps prevent preventable injuries and deaths among Maryland's youth.

Free State PTA urges the committee to issue a favorable report on HB1123.

Thank you,
Free State PTA, Advocacy Committee