

Brady
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Testimony of Daniel Sagrera, State Policy Manager
Support for HB 1608
Before the House Judiciary Committee
March 13, 2026

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair Davis, and Distinguished Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

Founded in 1974, Brady works to change the law, change the industry, and change culture to free America from gun violence. Our organization today carries the name of Jim Brady, who was shot and severely injured in the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan. Jim and his wife, Sarah, led the fight to pass federal legislation requiring background checks for gun sales. Brady continues to uphold Jim and Sarah's legacy by uniting Americans across the country in the fight to prevent gun violence.

There are evidence-based policy solutions that we know will help to prevent gun violence in Maryland. The bill before you today, HB 1608, will encourage responsible and safe firearm storage practices and save lives by ensuring that fewer minors can, and do, access firearms. **For these reasons, Brady supports HB 1608.**

Safe Storage Saves Lives

Nationwide, more than 4.6 million minors live in homes with unsecured guns.¹ A study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2018 found that within a sample of parents who owned guns, only one third stored all household firearms locked and unloaded.² Another study, released in 2023, found that 92% of guns used in accidental shooting deaths among children were left unlocked and loaded.³ Additionally, a 2010 study showed that over 70 percent of children reported knowing the storage location of the household firearm, and that 1 in 5 parents who reported that their child had never handled the household firearm were contradicted by their child's report. As a result, 70-90 percent of firearms used in unintentional shootings, school shootings, and suicides by minors are acquired from home or the homes

¹ Azrael, A., Cohen, J., Salhi C., et al. (2018). Firearm storage in gun-owning households with children: results of a 2015 national survey. *Journal of Urban Health*, 95. www.doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0261-7

² Scott, J., Azrael, D., & Miller, M. (2018). Firearm storage in homes with children with self-harm risk factors. *Pediatrics*, 141(3), e20172600. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-2600>

³ Vaishnav, A., Smith, G.A., Badeti, J. et al. (June 26, 2023). An epidemiological study of unintentional pediatric firearm fatalities in the USA, 2009–2018. *Injury Epidemiology*, 10(25). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-023-00438-5>

of friends or relatives.⁴ Among children, 89 percent of unintentional shooting deaths occur in the home.⁵

Unintentional shootings involving minors are preventable

Studies show keeping a gun locked and unloaded is associated with a protective effect against unintentional firearm injuries in homes with children and teenagers.⁶ This finding is bolstered by recent research from 2018 showing Child Access Prevention laws (“CAP laws”) that require safe storage of firearms are associated with a significant reduction in unintentional pediatric firearm injuries.⁷ In fact, a 2020 study found a 59 percent decrease in overall unintentional firearm deaths in states that have safe storage laws.⁸

We have seen the rates of unintentional shootings skyrocket among children, especially with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. With more children at home due to COVID-19, there was a 40 percent increase in unintentional shootings over 2020-2021 when compared to the 2 years prior to the start of the pandemic.⁹ There is especially concern for children’s safety during the summer season, as most children are spending more time at home. It is critical that Maryland pass a policy that rises to the occasion of protecting our children from entirely preventable tragedies.

Tragically, many school shootings are also facilitated by kids or teens having access to unsecured guns at home. A 2019 U.S. Department of Homeland Security analysis of targeted school violence shows that 76 percent of attackers who used firearms to commit violence in schools obtained the firearm from their parents’ home or the home of another close relative.¹⁰ In half of those cases, the evidence indicated the firearm was either readily accessible or not secured in a meaningful way.¹¹

Finally, the rate of firearm suicides among children under the age of 18 has steadily increased over the past decade. Over that time, the number of firearm suicides among minors in the United States has

⁴ Johnson, R. M., Barber, C., Azrael, D., et al. (2010). Who are the owners of firearms used in adolescent suicides?. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*, 40(6), 609–611. <https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.2010.40.6.609>; See also Li, G., Baker, S. P., DiScala, C., et al., (1996). Factors associated with the intent of firearm-related injuries in pediatric trauma patients. *Archives Of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 150(11), 1160–1165. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.1996.02170360050008>; See also Cox, J. W., & Rich, S. (August 1, 2018). *The gun is not in the closet*. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2018/08/01/feature/school-shootings-should-parents-be-charged-for-failing-to-lock-up-guns-used-by-their-kids>

⁵ Li, G., Baker, S. P., DiScala, C., et al., (1996). Factors associated with the intent of firearm-related injuries in pediatric trauma patients. *Archives Of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 150(11), 1160–1165. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.1996.02170360050008>

⁶ Grossman, D. C., Mueller, B. A., Riedy, C., et al. (2005). Gun storage practices and risk of youth suicide and unintentional firearm injuries. *JAMA*, 293(6), 707–714. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.293.6.707>

⁷ Hamilton, E., Miller, C., Cox, C., et al. (2018) Variability of child access prevention laws and pediatric firearm injuries. *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*, 84 (4), 613–619. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322106454_Variability_of_Child_Access_Prevention_Laws_and_Pediatric_Firearm_Injuries

⁸ Azad, H. A., Monuteaux, M. C., Rees, C. A., et al. (2020). Child access prevention firearm laws and firearm fatalities among children aged 0 to 14 years, 1991-2016. *JAMA pediatrics*, 174(5), 463–469. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.6227>

⁹ Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund. (April 13, 2023). *Preventable tragedies: unintentional shootings by children*. Everytown. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/preventable-tragedies-unintentional-shootings-by-children/>.

¹⁰ Alathari, L., Drysdale, D., Driscoll, S., et al. (2019). *Protecting America's schools: a U.S. secret service analysis of targeted school violence*. National Threat Assessment Center. <https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/ussc-analysis-of-targeted-school-violence.pdf>

¹¹ See footnote 8.

doubled from 361 deaths in 2008 to 725 deaths in 2018.¹² Moreover, a 2019 study found that in as many as 75 percent of youth firearm suicides for which the gun storage method could be identified, the gun was stored loaded and unlocked.¹³ The evidence is clear: access to firearms is not only affecting minors; having a firearm easily accessible in the home when a family member is at risk of suicide increases the risk of a deadly outcome should that person attempt suicide. Firearms are the most lethal method used in suicide deaths, with a fatality rate of approximately 90 percent.¹⁴ Frequently, the decision to harm oneself is made abruptly: a quarter of individuals who attempt suicide make the attempt within 5 minutes of deciding to end their lives.¹⁵ This means putting barriers in place to prevent easy access to lethal means can delay a suicide attempt in the event of a crisis, giving someone who is struggling more time to seek help. In fact, research supports that storing firearms locked and unloaded can be an effective measure to reduce the risk of suicide.¹⁶ Importantly, unsafe firearm storage was found to be least likely among families living in states with both CAP laws and stronger firearm legislation.¹⁷

There is a large body of academic research showing that strong CAP laws are associated with significant reductions in rates of suicide and unintentional firearms deaths and injuries among children and teens.¹⁸ In 2004, the Journal of the American Medical Association published research finding that child access prevention law enactment is associated with a 26 percent annual reduction in self-inflicted firearm injuries among youth and an 8 percent decrease in *overall* suicide rates among 14-17 year olds, strongly suggesting that when firearms are inaccessible as a result of these laws, minors are not substituting firearms with other methods.¹⁹ A recent study showed that states that have safe storage laws see a 78 percent drop in unintentional shootings committed by children compared to states that do not have any safe storage laws in place.²⁰

What this bill does

This bill is about reinforcing secure gun storage as a core aspect of responsible gun ownership in Maryland. This bill would bring Maryland's secure gun storage law up to the gold standard of states that require **all** gun owners to securely store their guns when not being used or carried. It would also raise the storage standard of Maryland's existing child access prevention law to require storage in a secure storage depository at all times that the firearm is not under the person's direct control.

California, Connecticut, Hawai'i, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Rhode Island have emerged as leaders in

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *WISQARS injury data*, <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>

¹³ The effects of child-access prevention laws. (January 10, 2023). RAND. <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/child-access-prevention.html>

¹⁴ Miller, M., Azrael, D., & Hemenway, D. (2004). The epidemiology of case fatality rates for suicide in the northeast. *Annals Of Emergency Medicine*, 43(6), 723–730. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-2605\(04\)00069-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0166-2605(04)00069-1)

¹⁵ Simon, O. R., Swann, A. C., Powell, K. E., et al. (2001). Characteristics of impulsive suicide attempts and attempters. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*, 32(1 Suppl), 49–59. <https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.32.1.5.49.24212>

¹⁶ Shenassa, E. D., Rogers, M. L., Spalding, K. L., et al. (2004). Safer storage of firearms at home and risk of suicide: a study of protective factors in a nationally representative sample. *Journal Of Epidemiology And Community Health*, 58(10), 841–848. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2003.017343>

¹⁷ Prickett, K. C., Martin-Storey, A., & Crosnoe, R. (2014). State firearm laws, firearm ownership, and safety practices among families of preschool-aged children. *American Journal Of Public Health*, 104(6), 1080–1086. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.30192government-tested8>

¹⁸ See footnote 10.

¹⁹ Webster, D. W., Vernick, J. S., Zeoli, A. M., et al. (2004). Association between youth-focused firearm laws and youth suicides. *JAMA*, 292(5), 594–601. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.292.5.594>

²⁰ See footnote 7.

this cultural shift by enacting general secure storage mandates for all firearm owners.²¹ These states have created a general obligation for all gun owners or lawfully authorized users to securely store a firearm (ideally in a locked box, safe, or government-tested security device) when it is not under their direct control. If enacted, these bills will work to prevent unintentional shootings, mass shootings, school-based violence, firearm suicide, firearm theft, and trafficking.

This proposed law does not infringe upon an individual's Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms in the home — rather, firearms ownership comes with a responsibility to ensure that lethal weapons are not readily accessible to minors who either cannot yet responsibly handle firearms themselves or who are at risk of harming themselves or others. Securing firearms in the home is compatible with a firearm owner's ability to protect the home. There is a wide range of firearm storage options available on the market that are affordable and enable the owner of the gun to access it quickly if necessary. Research clearly shows that robust child access prevention and safe storage laws help protect children and reduce the risk of firearm suicide, and unintentional shootings by kids and teens in homes across America. Safe storage has a measurable impact on reducing the rate of suicide and in preventing unintentional shootings that result in injury or death. Laws around safe storage have been upheld by the courts nationwide and the research is conclusive: safe storage saves lives.

Brady strongly encourages a favorable report for HB 1608, which mandates that all firearms be stored inaccessible to children under the age of 18 and will help to prevent injuries and fatalities among children.

Sincerely,

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Brady: Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence

²¹ Giffords, *Child Access & Safe Storage*
<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/child-consumer-safety/child-access-prevention-and-safe-storage/>