

HB 1608

Favorable

TO: Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Molly Burger
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750 E Pratt Street, Baltimore, MD 21202

DATE: March 11, 2026

RE: HB 1608 Public Safety – Firearms – Storage Requirements

I am a Maryland resident and a member of the law and policy team at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. This testimony represents my opinion and support of **HB 1608** and does not necessarily reflect that of Johns Hopkins University.

The Center for Gun Violence Solutions at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health conducts rigorous scientific research to assess the effectiveness of strategies to curb gun violence. We advocate for policies supported by strong evidence, and secure storage laws like HB 1608 are one of our top policy priorities due to their demonstrated effectiveness at reducing all forms of gun violence.

HB 1608 and Secure Storage in Maryland

HB 1608 would fill critical gaps in Maryland’s firearm storage laws. Currently, Maryland does not have a general secure storage requirement and only prohibits persons from leaving firearms where a minor is likely to gain unsupervised access (referred to as a child access prevention or “CAP” law). While important, the existing CAP law leaves open significant gaps: It depends on a gun owner’s awareness of a minor’s likelihood of access, and it does not cover unauthorized access by persons other than minors, which poses similar safety risks. Strong safe storage policies like those proposed in HB 1608 place a physical barrier between a firearm and *any* unauthorized user who may be at risk of harming themselves or others, whether intentionally or accidentally.

HB 1608 would establish a general safe storage requirement, taking any guesswork out of the equation by requiring all gun owners to securely store firearms whenever they are not in use or

being carried on one's person. It specifies what qualifies as a secure storage depository, including that it must be incapable of being opened without an unlocking device and able to prevent unauthorized access once locked. HB 1608 also provides that compliance with secure storage requirements is an exception to liability under the CAP law. These provisions will help ensure that firearms are secure from all unauthorized access, not just from unsupervised minors.

Strong Secure Storage Laws Effectively Address Gun Violence

More than half of all U.S. gun owners—including 55% of gun owners with children in the home—do not practice safe firearm storage.¹ An estimated 82% of adolescent firearm suicides involve a gun belonging to a family member,² and approximately 74% of school shooters access a firearm from either their own home or the home of a friend or relative.³

Safe storage laws are among the most well-studied and evaluated state gun laws. Numerous studies show that these laws are associated with reductions in rates of all forms of gun violence, including firearm homicide, suicide, unintentional shootings, and overall youth violence.⁴

Safe storage laws also help reduce gun theft, which poses a major public safety risk. Data indicates that more than 350,000 firearms are stolen annually.⁵ And gun owners who own more than six firearms and do not securely store one or more of those firearms are twice as likely⁶ to experience firearm theft compared to peers who securely store all of their firearms. As stolen firearms are nearly nine times as likely⁷ to be recovered at a crime scene, storing firearms securely helps reduce the flow of guns to criminal markets and prevent people from acquiring firearms who cannot obtain them legally.

Maryland has made significant strides in addressing gun violence, but too many families continue to lose loved ones to gun violence, including by unintentional shootings and firearm suicide. Requiring *all* gun owners to securely store their firearms when not in use is one of the most important steps that the State can take to prevent these tragedies.

I respectfully request a favorable committee report on HB 1608.

Sincerely,

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¹ Crifasi CK, Doucette ML, McGinty EE, Webster DW, Barry CL, *Storage Practices of US Gun Owners in 2016*, AM. J. PUB. HEALTH (Apr. 2018), 108(4):532-537. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2017.304262. Epub 2018 Feb 22. PMID: 29470124; PMCID: PMC5844398.

² Knopov A, Sherman RJ, Raifman JR, Larson E, Siegel MB, *Household Gun Ownership and Youth Suicide Rates at the State Level, 2005-2015*, AM. J. PREV. MED. (Mar. 2019), 56(3):335-342. doi: 10.1016/j.amepre.2018.10.027. Epub 2019 Jan 17. PMID: 30661885; PMCID: PMC6380939.

³ Alathari, L., et. al., *Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*, U.S. DEP'T OF HOMELAND SECURITY (2019), https://www.secretservice.gov/sites/default/files/2020-04/Protecting_Americas_Schools.pdf.

⁴ See, e.g., Cummings P, Grossman DC, Rivara FP, Koepsell TD, *State gun safe storage laws and child mortality due to firearms*, JAMA (Oct. 1997) 1;278(13):1084-6. PMID: 9315767; Webster DW, Starnes M, *Reexamining the association between child access prevention gun laws and unintentional shooting deaths of children*, PEDIATRICS (Dec. 2000), 106(6):1466-9. doi: 10.1542/peds.106.6.1466. PMID: 11099605; Anderson DM, Sabia JJ, Tekin E, *Child Access Prevention Laws and Juvenile Firearm-Related Homicides*, J. URBAN ECON, (Nov. 2021) 126:103387. doi: 10.1016/j.jue.2021.103387. Epub 2021 Aug 29. PMID: 34898733; PMCID: PMC8664083.

⁵ Hemenway D, Azrael D, Miller M, *Whose guns are stolen? The epidemiology of gun theft victims*, INJURY EPIDEMIOLOGY (2017), 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-017-0109-8>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Alain Stephens, *Lost and Stolen Guns Are More Likely to Be Used in Crimes, Study Finds*, THE TRACE (Apr. 10, 2024), <https://www.thetrace.org/2024/04/crime-stolen-lost-gun-sales-california/>.