



**Testimony in Support of the
Public Safety - Firearms - Storage Requirements
House Bill 1608**

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Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence (MPGV) is a statewide organization dedicated to reducing gun deaths and injuries through evidence-based policy, public education, and survivor-centered prevention strategies. We support HB 1608, Public Safety - Firearms - Storage Requirements.

Maryland has had a rash of tragic, and almost tragic, firearm-related incidents involving children this year that stem from gun owners' irresponsible behavior with their firearms. While we applaud this body for its passage of Jaelynn's Law three years ago, the fact of the matter is that it is not enough. When states were moving toward better outcomes in traffic safety through the adoption of seat belt laws, those mandates were not limited to certain age groups. While it is well-intentioned to ensure that firearms kept in the presence of children are more securely maintained, the reality is that the presence of children in our lives is a constantly changing dynamic. Children are born. Children grow up. People enter into relationships with new partners who have children. Yet there is no mechanism that forces gun owners to reassess firearm safety practices as life circumstances evolve. We must move toward real culture change in the gun-owning community centered around strong minimum standards of gun safety. Safe storage should simply be the norm, and we achieve that by establishing clear baseline standards for how firearms are stored. In addition this issue is much larger than just addressing those incidents involving youth. While we often hear stories about youth accessing guns, there are likely far more incidents involving unauthorized adults accessing unsecured firearms.

Research consistently demonstrates that safe storage policies save lives. Today, more than half of gun owners report storing at least one firearm unsafely, without a lock, safe, or other secure storage measure. Nearly a quarter report storing all of their firearms unlocked in the home. These practices create preventable risks not only for children, but for anyone who might gain access to an unattended firearm, including visitors, family members, or individuals experiencing a crisis.

The risk to children and teens is particularly acute. An estimated 4.6 million minors in the United States live in homes with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm. Many children know where guns are stored and are able to access them quickly, even when parents believe otherwise. Research shows that although 70 percent of parents believe their child cannot independently access household firearms, more than one-third of adolescents in those homes report they could access a gun within five minutes. Household firearms are also the primary source of guns used in youth suicides, unintentional shootings among children, and school shootings perpetrated by



individuals under the age of eighteen. Studies indicate that between 70 and 90 percent of guns used in these incidents come from the child's own home or the homes of relatives or friends.

Safe storage laws help prevent these tragedies. Numerous studies over the past two decades have found that strong child access prevention and safe storage laws are associated with meaningful reductions in firearm injuries and deaths among young people. One study found that these laws were associated with a 13 percent reduction in firearm fatalities among children ages 0–14, including decreases in firearm homicides, suicides, and unintentional shootings. Even modest increases in safe storage practices could prevent nearly one-third of youth firearm deaths caused by suicide or unintentional injury.

Safe storage is also critical for preventing adult firearm suicide. Research shows that individuals living in homes where firearms are stored locked and unloaded are significantly less likely to die by firearm suicide than those in homes where guns are stored unlocked or loaded. In addition, states that require handguns to be locked under certain circumstances have seen reductions in firearm suicide rates more broadly.

Finally, safe storage requirements are an important tool for preventing gun theft. Hundreds of thousands of firearms are stolen from private gun owners each year, often from homes and vehicles where they were left unsecured. These firearms frequently end up in the underground market and are later recovered by law enforcement in connection with violent crimes, including homicides and armed robberies. Survey data suggest that gun owners who fail to safely store their firearms are significantly more likely to have their guns stolen.

Maryland has long been a leader in adopting evidence-based firearm safety policies. Establishing minimum safe storage standards is the logical next step in that work. Just as we have normalized seat belts, child safety seats, and other basic safety precautions, we can normalize responsible firearm storage. Clear, consistent storage standards will help create a culture in which gun ownership and gun safety go hand in hand.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge a favorable report on this legislation.