



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of HB 486 - Public Safety - Access to Firearms - Storage Requirements

TO: Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Stephen C. Buckingham, Chair, Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland.

DATE: February 25, 2019

I am here today because gun violence is a moral issue and a religious problem. It is a moral issue because the suffering of innocents at the hands of other human beings is defined as an evil, and people of faith are required to confront evil. It is a religious problem because faith groups and their clergy are repeatedly called upon to respond to and alleviate the suffering of the innocent. We always hear that suffering victims and their families deserve our “thoughts and prayers.”

In ancient times, evil was thought of as something with cosmic causes; floods, earthquakes, and fires were called Acts of God or sent by evil forces. But nowadays, we increasingly define "evil" as something caused by human agency: crime, oppression, sexual abuse, mass murder. The difference is that human-created evil can, and should, be prevented whenever possible. Our scriptures may not speak with one voice about why suffering happens, but they are unanimous in commanding people of faith to actively respond to that human suffering.

As the natural consequence of our compassionate response to human suffering, we are called to seek ways to reduce this suffering by supporting preventive measures, laws to keep guns out of the hands of people who can misuse them, including people convicted of violent assaults, those suffering from mental illness capable of harming themselves or others, domestic abusers, and children. For this reason, we support SB 441 which further limits access to firearms for children. It better defines how a firearm should be stored to deny access to an unsupervised child, requires the storage of unloaded firearms as well as loaded guns, and raises the age to 18.

We cannot prevent natural disasters, so when hurricanes and tornadoes happen, the best we can do is send aid. Human behavior is responsive to concerted action. When negligence or malevolence causes the deaths of children – in schoolrooms, on city streets, and in homes – we can and must take action both to heal and to stop it. A church that did nothing in the face of innocent suffering wouldn't be worthy of the name.

The measure before you today is another tool for law enforcement to protect the people from gun violence. We urge a favorable report.

Stephen C. Buckingham

Lay Community Minister and Chair

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