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Testimony of Ramya Swami, Manager, State Policy, Brady  
**Support for Senate File 4312 and 606**  
Before the Minnesota Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee  
March 22, 2024

Support for SF 4312: Safe Storage

**SF 4312 requires gun owners to store their firearms unloaded with a locking device, or loaded or unloaded in a locked firearm storage unit.**

As outlined above, the statistics regarding suicide in Minnesota are staggering. Each year 491 people in Minnesota die by firearm suicide.<sup>1</sup> When a person or a child is at risk for suicide, we want to create as much time and distance between them and the method as possible. While moments of crisis are extremely dangerous, they are often temporary. If a firearm is safely stored, it is less likely to be used during a moment of urgent — but temporary — distress.

The availability and effectiveness of firearms greatly increases the risk of a fatal outcome, should someone attempt suicide.<sup>2</sup> Putting barriers in place between a person thinking of suicide and their preferred method of suicide can delay or prevent a suicide attempt altogether. Storing firearms locked and unloaded, with ammunition stored separately, can thus be an effective measure to reduce the risk of suicide.<sup>3</sup>

Nationwide, almost 4.6 million minors live in homes with unsecured guns.<sup>4</sup> A study published by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2018 found that within a sample of parents who owned guns, only

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)* [online]. (2005) [cited 2023 Feb. 2]. Available at: [www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars](http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars).

<sup>2</sup> Drexler, Madeline. "Guns and Suicide: The Hidden Toll." *Harvard Public Health*, [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine\\_article/guns-suicide/](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/guns-suicide/).

<sup>3</sup> Shenassa ED, Rogers ML, Spalding KL, Roberts MB. "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*. 2004; 58(10):841-848.

<sup>4</sup> Azrael, D. et al., (2018) *Firearm Storage in Gun-Ownning Households with Children: Results of a 2015 National Survey*. *Journal of Urban Health* 95, 295-304. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11524-018-0261-7>

one third stored all household firearms locked and unloaded.<sup>5</sup> Another 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.<sup>6</sup> As a result, 70-90 percent of firearms used in unintentional shootings, school shootings and suicides by minors are acquired from home, or from the homes of friends or relatives.<sup>7</sup> Keeping guns locked and unloaded was found to have a protective effect against unintentional shootings and suicide among youth, reducing the risk of death by 73 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Unintentional shootings that involve minors are preventable. SF 4312 mandates the safe storage of firearms, where all firearms are stored locked, unloaded, with ammunition stored separately, and is an effective strategy to reduce unintentional injury or death of a child.<sup>9</sup> These are strategies directly in line with the values of gun owners who place protection of family above all other reasons to own firearms, and also inherently respect all individual's Constitutional rights.

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 obtained the firearm from their parent's home or the home of another close relative.<sup>10</sup> In half of those cases, the evidence indicated that the firearm was either readily accessible or not secured in a meaningful way.<sup>11</sup> Research published in 2020 investigating firearm-related deaths among children aged 0-14 found that over a 26-year time period, U.S. states with safe storage laws regulating the storage of firearms in households with minors had a 13 percent reduction in firearm fatalities in the specified age group when compared to states with no such regulations.<sup>12</sup>

Further, 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 individuals 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.

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<sup>5</sup> Scott, J. et al., (February 2018). *Firearm Storage in Homes With Children With Self-Harm Risk Factors*. American Academy of Pediatrics, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2018/02/19/peds.2017-2600.info>.

<sup>6</sup> Salhi C. et al., (March 2021). *Parent and Adolescent Reports of Adolescent Access to Household Firearms in The United States*. (March 2021) JAMA Network Open; 4(3):e2108989. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33687444/>

<sup>7</sup> Alathari, L. et al., (November 2019). *Protecting America's Schools A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*. United States Secret Service. U.S. Department of Homeland Security United States. <https://www.secretservice.gov/data/protection/ntac/usss-analysis-of-targeted-scholl.violence.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Grossman, D. C. (2005). *Gun storage practices and risk of youth suicide and unintentional firearm injuries*. JAMA. 293(6):707-714, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/200330>

<sup>9</sup> Grossman, David C. "Gun Storage Practices and Risk of Youth Suicide and Unintentional Firearm Injuries." *JAMA* 293, no. 6 (2005): 707. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.293.6.707>.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> Azad, H. et al., (May 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://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32119063/>

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 urges the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee to pass SF 4312, which requires gun owners to store their firearms unloaded with a locking device and separately from its ammunition.**

#### Support for SF 0606: Lost or Stolen Firearms

Lost and stolen guns help feed the underground gun market in the state of Minnesota and beyond. Nationwide, the FBI estimated that 1.8 million firearms were stolen from private individuals between 2012 and 2017,<sup>13</sup> and a 2017 study concluded that approximately 380,000 firearms are stolen from private individuals annually.<sup>14</sup> Between 2010 and 2016, a majority of the 23,000 stolen firearms recovered by police were connected with crimes - including more than 1,500 violent crimes.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, the National Crime Victimization Survey revealed that, from 2011 to 2015, 23 percent of guns stolen from individuals went unreported to law enforcement.<sup>16</sup>

There is a clear crisis of lost and stolen firearms across the country that supplies the criminal gun market, but the lack of expeditious reporting further impedes criminal investigations as these firearms are notoriously difficult to trace. This directly interferes with law enforcement's ability to quickly identify suspects tied to serious gun crimes. As noted in a recent ATF report: "Those that steal firearms commit violent crimes with stolen guns, transfer stolen arms to others who commit crimes, and create an unregulated secondary market for firearms."<sup>17</sup> In fact, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the official trade association for the firearms industry, has also reported on the severity of firearm theft in the U.S. In 2017, Larry Keane, the Senior VP of the NSSF stated, "there are more guns stolen every year than there are violent crimes with firearms. Gun owners should be aware of the issue."<sup>18</sup>

Lost or stolen firearms are a major source fueling gun crimes within the state of Minnesota. Researchers at Everytown for Gun Safety analyzed FBI crime data across hundreds of small to large cities including 7 cities in Minnesota and found that in 2020, an estimated 77,000 guns were reported stolen in these cities alone.<sup>19</sup>

SF 0606 will work to curb the dangerous consequences of lost and stolen firearms. Law enforcement has rightly identified that the sooner they are made aware of missing, lost, or stolen firearms, the higher the chance that they can recover those firearms and prevent them from being used in shootings. A research

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<sup>13</sup> Chelsea Parsons and Eugenio Weigend Vargas, *Gun Theft in the United States: A State-by-State Analysis*, Ctr. for Amer. Progress (Mar. 2020), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/news/2020/03/04/481029/gun-theft-united-states-state-state-analysis/>.

<sup>14</sup> David Hemenway, et. al, *Whose Guns Are Stolen: The Epidemiology of Gun Theft Victims*, 4 Injury Epidemiology 11 (Dec. 2017), available at [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5385318/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5385318/).

<sup>15</sup> Brian Freskos, *Missing pieces: Gun theft from legal gun owners is on the rise, quietly fueling violent crime across America*, The Trace (Nov. 20, 2017), available at <https://bit.ly/2izST1h>.

<sup>16</sup> Chelsea Parsons and Eugenio Weigend Vargas, *Stolen Guns in America: A State-by-State Analysis*, Ctr. for Amer. Progress (July 2017) at Table 2, available at [www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2017/07/25/436533/stolen-guns-america/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2017/07/25/436533/stolen-guns-america/).

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, *supra* at 2.

<sup>18</sup> Freskos, *supra* at 4.

<sup>19</sup> O'Toole MJ, Szkola J, Burd-Sharps S, *Gun Theft from Cars: The Largest Source of Stolen Guns*, Everytown for Gun Safety (May 9 2022), available at <https://everytownresearch.org/gun-thefts-from-cars-the-largest-source-of-stolen-guns/>

team from Johns Hopkins University also found that mandatory reporting of firearm theft or loss by private gun owners helped to prevent gun trafficking into neighboring states. States with strong reporting laws were 30 percent less likely to export crime guns across state lines.<sup>20</sup> The authors of this study noted “[these laws] are intended to increase private gun seller accountability and provide law enforcement with a tool to combat illegal straw purchases when the individuals involved present dubious claims of unreported gun theft. Having this measure of accountability significantly reduced interstate gun trafficking.”<sup>21</sup>

**Brady strongly encourages the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee to pass SF 0606. Strong and comprehensive laws that mandate gun owners to notify law enforcement officials when a firearm is lost or stolen, are key in reducing gun trafficking and straw purchasing. SF 0606 will also work to aid law enforcement in recovering and returning lost and stolen guns to their rightful owners.**

### Conclusion

In a time when gun violence in the United States is steadily increasing, Minnesota has the opportunity to lead by example by enacting and implementing proactive, research-informed policy solutions that prevent gun violence, save lives, and spare entire communities from loss, trauma and cycles of violence. The legislation laid forth in this letter proposes universal background checks, expands extreme risk protection orders, mandates safe storage of firearms, and creates reporting requirements for lost and stolen firearms - all of which are tried and true measures that have been taken in other states to reduce gun violence.

***For the reasons described above, Brady urges the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee to support the passage of Senate Files 4312 and 606.***

Sincerely,

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel W. Webster et.al, *Reducing Gun Violence in America: Informing Policy with Evidence and Analysis*, The Johns Hopkins University Press 118 (2013), available at [https://jhupress.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/1421411113\\_updf.pdf](https://jhupress.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/1421411113_updf.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*