

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the SAFE Act today.

I'm Stephanie Rosen, the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness or NAMI of Montgomery County, Maryland. NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. We envision a future where all people affected by mental health conditions live healthy, fulfilling lives supported by a community that cares. We are individuals living with mental health conditions and their families, loved ones, and caregivers and we provide education, support, and advocacy for all affected by mental health conditions.

As the voice of those directly affected by mental health conditions, we strongly support the passage of Bill 36-23 Sale of Firearms or Ammunition - Suicide Awareness and Firearm Education (SAFE) Act.

Suicide and gun violence are public health crises in America, threatening our communities' health and well-being. In 2020, firearm-related injuries rose to the [highest number on record](#) and became the [leading cause of death](#) for children and adolescents. Most firearm deaths each year are suicides, and firearms are the most common method used for suicide. As a result, in 2020, [over 24,000 lives](#) were tragically lost to suicide using firearms. You might be asking why guns? It's because firearms are particularly lethal; nearly [90%](#) of all gun suicide attempts result in death. Who in our community is most at risk? Suicide is the [second](#) leading cause of death for people ages 10-14 and the third leading cause of death for people ages 15-24. Veterans are also at a greater risk of suicide. In 2019, [70%](#) of all male veteran suicides and [50%](#) of all female Veteran suicides resulted from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Suicide doesn't just affect the person who dies; it shatters families and devastates communities.

I want to make clear that individuals living with mental health conditions are not violent or a danger to others. I am talking about self-directed gun violence. Research shows that individuals living with a mental health condition are more likely to be victims of violence instead of perpetrators.

This type of legislation can serve as a partnership with firearms retailers to prevent suicide, it is not a penalty. Even people who sell firearms or ammunition can be part of this beautiful act of helping someone get help when they need it the most.

This isn't about restriction, this legislation is not anti-gun. This is about saving lives. This legislation highlights the imperative role we can all play in suicide prevention.

Interventions at the point of sale of ammunition or firearms are an evidence-based and recommended strategy to prevent suicide. Collaboration between firearm retailers and public health professionals is not new. It started in New Hampshire in 2009 when a suicide prevention researcher and a local firearm retailer connected after a series of three suicides in 1 week involving guns purchased from a single

Hope starts here.

store. In the years since the New Hampshire initiative, numerous other states have created similar partnerships across the country. Gun stores can have a role in preventing suicide. In 2012 the surgeon general called for health officials to partner with firearm dealers and gun owner groups to incorporate suicide awareness as a basic tenet of firearm safety and responsible firearm ownership.

This morning I accepted a proclamation from the Montgomery County Executive and Montgomery County Council marking today as World Mental Health Day. This morning I spoke about hope and how hope starts with ALL of us. Hope starts with talking about mental health. Hope starts with making information accessible. Hope starts with providing resources and practical advice. Hope starts with us sharing our stories. Hope starts with breaking the stigma that mental illnesses are different than physical illnesses.

Let's give hope to the many affected by mental health conditions and suicide. Let's work together to save lives. Let's provide life-saving information at the time of the sale of ammunition and firearms.

You might be wondering how a pamphlet or brochure can save a life. In the spirit of sharing our stories, I live with depression. I have had suicidal ideation, and I have created a plan. When I or anyone is experiencing suicidal ideation, your brain is telling you the only way to feel better is death, that death is the solution. We know that is not reality, we know that is the mental illness talking, and most people living with a mental health condition respond to treatment and go on to live meaningful lives. Every opportunity we give to tell people there is hope and your brain is wrong, you have options, prevents suicide.

Thank you,



Stephanie Rosen
NAMI Montgomery County
Executive Director

Hope starts here.