

Spring 2013



Maryland SCFRT Members

Tim Allen, MS

A. LaToya Bates, LCSW-C

Lt. Joseph Gamble

Mary Gentile, LCSW-C

Roger J. Lerner, Esq.

**Richard Lichenstein, MD**

Chairperson

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Vernice McKee, MSW

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David Putsche

Ernest Reitz, JD

John Rusinko, MSW

Hal Sommers, MA

Betty Stemley, JD

Allen Walker, MD

Anntinette Williams, LICSW

**DHMH Advisors**

Bonnie Birkel, CRNP, MPH

Lee Hurt, MS, DrPH

S. Lee Woods, MD, PhD

**DHMH Staff Support**

Joan Patterson, LCSW-C  
(410-767-6727)

# Maryland State Child Fatality Review Team (SCFRT)



**Maryland SCFRT Newsletter**

## From Our State Team Chairperson, Rich Lichenstein, MD:

### Guns and Our Children: A Few Facts to Consider

With the tragedy in Newtown CT, and the recent activity on a national and statewide level regarding guns, here are some thoughts regarding guns and children.

Thirty eight percent of Americans own guns. In 2010, there were about 31,000 gun deaths (11,000 murders, 19,000 suicides, and 600 unintentional fatalities) in the US. Children can be the victims of guns by unintentional means, by homicide and by suicide. Accidents occur in the mostly young, while suicides occur in adolescents and young adults.

We know that children are by nature curious and learn by experience. Every week, one child under 15 dies due to an unintentional firearm injury. Gun safety courses are ineffective but reduced child access does succeed in preventing unintentional injuries and death.

Suicide is the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of death for teens. Firearms are the most common method and are associated with a 90% mortality rate. Adolescents very frequently will be rash and there is a brief interval between decision and action. There is evidence that suggests that the presence of firearms in the home increases the risk of suicide among adolescents.

More than 80% of homicides in adolescents and young adults 15-19 are firearms related. Most occur in cities and young black men have the highest rates. Risk of homicide is greater with drug, alcohol or tobacco use. Guns are a poor means of conflict resolution and guns on any campus are a recipe for danger.

Research shows us that bringing a gun into a home to protect one's family is perilous, especially if there are mentally unstable people living at home.

Although there will always be vigorous debate on the right to bear arms, as advocates for the safety of children these recommendations should be self evident:

- ▶ Enact an effective ban on assault weapons and ban high capacity magazines
- ▶ Eliminate the gun show loophole and require mandatory background checks and waiting periods before all firearm purchases
- ▶ Enact strong handgun regulations
- ▶ Require safe storage of firearms. A gun in the home is a danger to your family. If you keep a gun, empty it and lock it up. Safe storage reduces the risk that a loaded gun will be found by a child

In closing, whatever are your personal feelings on guns, children deserve to feel safe and to be safe in their homes, communities and schools – a “gun - free” environment is an important step to ensure the safety of children.





#### Mark Your Calendars

#### **Upcoming SCFRT meetings**

**Friday, May 31, 2013**

**Howard County**

**Dept. of Fire & Rescue**

**James N. Robey Public Safety Training Center**

**and**

**September 25, 2013**

**Location TBA**



#### SAVE THE DATE!

#### **MARYLAND'S ANNUAL**

#### **SUICIDE PREVENTION**

**CONFERENCE 2013**

**Wednesday, October 2,**

**2013 Martin's West**

**Baltimore County**

**More information and registration instructions will be sent as they become available.**

## **Legislative Update: 'Landmark Legislation'**

### **Cyber Bullying of a Minor**

With the widespread use of computer technology by this country's youth, there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of cyber bullying in Maryland and across the nation. **Cyber Bullying** is the "electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person often done anonymously" (Source: Merriam-Webster Dictionary).



On May 2, 2013, Governor Martin O'Malley signed into effect new legislation "**Grace's Law**." This "*landmark legislation*" is named in honor of a 15 year Maryland high school student who committed suicide in 2012 after vicious cyber-bullying on social media sites. Grace McComas endured taunts, threats, obscenities and hate speech online. The new law respects the First Amendment protections of free speech while giving law enforcement a tool to use against anyone using electronic communication to threaten or inflict emotional distress on a minor. "It prohibits a person from using an interactive computer service to maliciously engage in conduct that inflicts serious emotional distress on a minor or places a minor in reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury with the intent to kill, injure, harass, or cause serious emotional distress to the minor, or to place the minor in reasonable fear of death or serious bodily injury". Grace's Law makes cyber bullying a misdemeanor and violators will be fined \$500 or face up to a year in jail. For more information: [legiscan.com/MD/text/HB396/id/708788](http://legiscan.com/MD/text/HB396/id/708788).

## **Safety Resources: [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)**

Safe Kids was founded in 1988 by Dr. Marty Eichelberger from the Children's National Medical Center and founding sponsor Johnson & Johnson. Today, Safe Kids works with an extensive network of more than 600 coalitions in the United States and partners with organizations in 23 countries around the world to reduce injuries from motor vehicles, sports, drownings, falls, burns, poisonings and more. This website has multiple resources for safety professionals, media, educators and families. They have quickly become a source for all types of safety information. On this site, you will find tips from top safety experts on everything you need to keep kids of any age safe from preventable injuries



Additionally, you will find research, fact sheets, curriculum, safety checklists and age-appropriate activities for kids during all seasons of the year.

Our state's office is Safe Kids Maryland. More information is available at [www.safekidsmd.org](http://www.safekidsmd.org) or by calling 410-706-1758.



If you have news to share, please contact the newsletter editor

Laurel Moody at [lmoody@stevenson.edu](mailto:lmoody@stevenson.edu)

**Visit Our State Child Fatality Review website:**

[http://fha.maryland.gov/mch/cfr\\_home.cfm](http://fha.maryland.gov/mch/cfr_home.cfm)

**For more information contact Joan Patterson**

**(410) 767-6727**

**[jpatterson@dhmh.state.md.us](mailto:jpatterson@dhmh.state.md.us)**

