



Before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee on Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization  
B22-0958, "Babies Safe at Home Act of 2018"

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Statement of Sadiqa Kendi, M.D., FAAP  
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Thank you for the leadership of the sponsors of this legislation, Councilmembers Kenyan R. McDuffie, Brianne Nadeau, Trayon White, Mary Cheh, Anita Bonds, Charles Allen, Vince Gray and David Grosso. Special thanks to Councilman Robert White for his leadership in conceiving of and introducing the Babies Safe at Home Act of 2018.

Unintentional injury is the number one cause of death of children 19 and under: it is car crashes with a child not buckled up, a drowning, poisoning from medications left on a nightstand or bathroom counter, and many other causes. They are all the more tragic because they could have been prevented.

Of the places in a child's daily environment that can present a risk, the home is the place where a parent has the greatest power to prevent unintentional injury. That is why we at Safe Kids Worldwide and Children's National Health System are so enthused about this legislation.

The power to transform a home into a safety zone for a new baby or toddler is meaningless without the resources to do so. The value of this legislation is that it gives families what they need to exercise the power. The power to keep your child safe is a gift. The grant program would mean that a parent need not make a choice between a new pair of shoes or a window guard; a worry-free ten-year smoke alarm or a car seat.

This legislation is evidence-based. For example, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number one killer of kids 1-4 is drowning and fire/burn is number 5. Infant suffocation which we speak about later in this testimony is the top cause of death for kids under age 1 and third for kids 1-4.

There are also stories of what happens when prevention steps are not taken.

One preventable tragedy we see all too often at Safe Kids is when a child falls out of an open window. This story didn't happen here in the District, but just across the river in Alexandria in May of this year—less than 9 miles from here. A 3-year-old boy fell through the screen of an open bedroom window from the 26th floor of the Skyline Towers Apartment building on Seminary Road. Window screens are meant to keep bugs out of a building, not to prevent a child from falling out. This boy's death could have been prevented with the simple installation of a window guard, which can cost around \$40 at Lowes.

Fire is another cause of preventable death and serious injury. There are indications home fires are increasing again because of the way homes are built and the materials used to build them. In August of this year there was a fire in a 2-story apartment building on Newcomb Street in Southeast affecting 17 people, including ten children. While a teenager had to jump from the second floor, fortunately, no one

died or even suffered serious injury in what could have been a massive tragedy. We need to thank our Fire Department for doing such a good job in limiting the fast-moving fire to the first floor. Unfortunately, many of these cases do not end so well. Dr. Kendi of the ED at Children's National has cared for too many children who have died, or sustained significant burns and inhalational injuries from fires in their home. How can this type of tragedy be prevented? The answer is smoke alarms and the home on Newcomb Street didn't have any. A smoke alarm with a 10-year battery runs \$29.97 at Lowes. You need to have at least one on every floor.

The tax-free grants will enable families to make such modifications and others. This is a family empowerment bill.

If we may be so bold as to make a few suggestions:

First, it is important that the grants are accompanied by education so that parents will know the dos and don'ts of child-proofing. We urge that the education include information on safe sleep practices because infant suffocation is one of the top killers of children in this age group. It should also urge parents to keep medications, cleaning supplies and other poisons up, away and out of sight. We can help with that. Safe Kids DC has been instrumental in reaching families in the district with life-saving tips. Parents received a home safety starter kit which included TV anti-tipover straps, blind cord wind-ups and cabinet locks.

Second, many of the families—probably most of them—who would might take advantage of the program do not own their homes. Often, leases prevent parents from making some additions, and the City should conduct active outreach to landlords to allow such safety tools to be installed. We favor the development of a kid friendly lease allowing parents to make reasonable modifications for child safety.

Third, in many homes, a grandparent is a caregiver, either full time or part time. We wonder if it makes sense to make the grants available to the grandparents who are so important to mothers and fathers of working families.

Fourth, in the enumerated products, please consider specifically including smoke alarms and devices to prevent gun related tragedies.

This is groundbreaking legislation and we at Safe Kids Worldwide will be sharing it with our grass roots army of 420 coalitions around the U.S. as a good idea to protect the children in their communities.

Safe Kids Worldwide was founded 30 years ago by Children's National Health System which is also the lead agency of Safe Kids DC. We are proud of the leadership from CNHS, which was rated among the top five pediatric institutions in the U.S by *U.S. News and World Report*, and number one for trauma care.

Thank you for your leadership and providing Safe Kids with this opportunity to speak to you about this important bill.

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