



Transcript

Gun Safety At Home feat. Kayla Austin

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[00:00:00] **Frank:** Every year, 19,000 children and teens are killed or wounded due to gun violence, and approximately 3 million are exposed to gun violence. In many cases, these guns were found within the home, meaning the deaths were highly preventable. Even a child survived being a shot, the mental scarring stays with them for years, possibly even life in America.

4.6 million children live in a house that has a gun that is loaded and unlocked. How do we keep them safe? Let's dig into it. Welcome to HU2U, the podcast where we bring today's important topics and stories from Howard University, right to you. I'm Frank Tramble, today's host, and I'm here with Kayla Austin, a rising junior at Howard University, gun violence activist and creator of my Guns.

Been Moved, a Gun safety device. Welcome to our podcast. How you doing, Kayla?

[00:00:59] **Kayla:** Good. Thank you for having me.

[00:01:00] **Frank:** Good. Good. All right, so tell us a little bit about this. My Gun's Been Moved, device and, and how it works.

[00:01:06] **Kayla:** Yeah, so my guns and moved, actually started when I was 12 years old. So, as mentioned, I'm a rising junior at Howard from the Chicagoland area, and in the seventh grade, my mom had me in this program called Junior Axo. At the time, I didn't want to be in it, but it ended up, like, changing my life. And this program I had to do a seven-month project where I got to choose a world problem, but my choice and then.

Research it, find my own solutions. And so, being from a Chicago area, I chose to focus on gun violence specifically against children and teens because I felt, like, that wasn't being talked about enough. And so, through doing that research, I found out that a lot of shootings involving children and teens involving parents' guns.

So, children are taking their parents guns, accidentally shooting themselves, siblings not even bringing them to school. Through doing this project, I found out that I actually had a family friend who had been impacted by this issue, when she was four years old. And so, seeing just how common these situations were, they don't always get the most media coverage was really what sparked me into wanting to learn more and try to find my own solution.



And I think. Growing up as someone who's in Gen Z, I feel, like, we have technology as a solution for everything. I was, like, why is there no technology in the space of gun safety? So, I invented a smart pad that lets parents monitor their weapons through their mobile device so they can know if their children obtain access or not.

So, our product gives parents a way to intervene and monitor with firearms.

[00:02:30] **Frank:** All right. Well, that's an amazing, amazing device there. Can you talk a little bit about, what motivated you specifically to create it? I mean, why'd you choose this as a part of that project?

[00:02:41] **Kayla:** I chose to study gun violence against youth. As I mentioned, like, being from my area, I felt like gun violence, something we talked about all the time, like, it was on the news, in our churches, different organizations. That's like a... that's a topic that you couldn't go without hearing about. But I felt like nobody was talking about how it was affecting young people and, like, what the root causes of that were. I remember in the case of Hadiya Pendleton. I think she was 15 or 16 years old. She was in President Obama's inauguration in Chicago, I think, a few weeks later was shot, like, walking after school. And so, I was like, "Wow, like, she looks like..." And yet, I just remember there was a larger national conversation going on about her death. And so, seeing that she looked like me made me want to learn more about the issue. And that's when I started to learn a lot about, like, these in-home shootings or these accidental shootings that could be prevented.

[00:03:27] **Frank:** Yeah. You know, I'm from Detroit, actually, from the east side of Detroit. And so, the area that I grew up in, you know, guns are very, very prevalent everywhere and in everyone. And I can't say that all of them were legal. I would venture to think that most of them around me weren't. You said you grew up in Chicago and gun violence was, kind of, normal in your area. Can you talk a little bit about what that experience has been like and how that has motivated you as well?

[00:03:52] **Kayla:** I live in the suburb of Chicago, so I can definitely say I've come from, like, a privileged position in that, every single day, I'm not constantly worried about if a gun will be pulled or fearing for my life no matter where I go. But I know that for people who are not that far away from me, or, like, cousins that I have, that that's something that they think about every single day, like, walking to school, going to the grocery store, things like that.

And so, I feel like, just knowing how different realities are, and I also think that, when I started my research, gun violence was just a leading cause of death for Black children and teens. And now, it's a leading cause of death for children everywhere around the country. So, it's interesting also to see that, now, I feel like it used to be a conversation of, "Oh, like, only worry about it if you're in the cities, like the large areas." But, now, like, this is something that everyone should



be concerned about. I think that everyone is concerned about, even, like, going to music festivals, movie theaters. Like, I feel like this might be just for all Americans, especially in Gen Z. Like, every time I go to a public place, I'm like, "Where would I run if something were to pop off right now?" But, like, that's also just the reality of the world that we live in now, too.

[00:04:55] **Frank:** Yeah. You know, there's quite a lot of disparity, actually, when it comes to gun deaths. So, here's some stats, and I want you to react to them. Gun deaths among children grew 50% between 2019 and 2021. And in 2021, 46% of all gun deaths among children and teens involve Black victims. So, basically, Black children and teens were roughly five times more likely than their White counterparts to die from gun violence in 2021. Does that shock you? Or, is that right on par with what you think?

[00:05:27] **Kayla:** Those are really disappointing to hear. I think the numbers were large than I thought they would be, but it doesn't shock me that Black youth are disproportionately affected by gun violence. It does not shock me at all, which is really a shame.

[00:05:39] **Frank:** Yeah. So, when we think about gun violence, we then think about, of course, gun safety and this device you've... you're creating to be a part of that. But also, before that, what's the conversation from your perspective been in the Black communities and about guns, in general? Does it need to change?

[00:05:56] **Kayla:** I think so. I think that, now, or, like, hearing the stat you said, I think you said from, like, 2019 to 2021. I think, especially with COVID going on, a lot of parents do not safely store the weapons. Like, they don't use gun safes. Like, 50% of gun owners aren't using that. And children know where firearms are. Children know where everything in the house is. Like, even if you think they don't, they do.

So, my dad definitely had those conversations with me about, like, you know, like, "This is something that you do not touch. We have it for the intention of protecting our household." And I think that a lot of young people don't have that conversation, so it leads to curiosity. And children, you know, or teens, like, we want to know about stuff that we don't know about. So, we have to find out by touching it, usually. So, I think that was in our community, if we encourage conversations about gun safety or encourage conversations with kids about, "Okay, like, don't touch this. This is where I have this. And this is for this intention only. We don't play with this," I think that having those conversations, starting at a young age, even depending on, like, your child, of course, I think that can also have a significant impact on reducing the risk of having a gun in the home as well.

[00:07:02] **Frank:** Yeah, I agree with you there. And I, I think there's so many times where, and we've seen it over and over again, that a child does get to a gun that is easily accessible, and



they don't know what to do with that, and they end up, you know, lives get lost very quickly because of that.

[00:07:17] **Kayla:** Mm-hmm.

[00:07:18] **Frank:** You are a student at Howard here. How has this conversation played out to some of your peers, as you've gone through just your, you know, daily life as a student?

[00:07:26] **Kayla:** Yeah, so it's been interesting. I'd say, in the spring semester, especially, I got to do a lot of panel or events, like focus on, like, social justice, gun violence, gun safety on campus with various students and, sometimes, organization leaders in D.C. And I would say it's an interesting topic. I feel like, at Howard, everyone comes from different socioeconomic backgrounds or different areas, so it's interesting to see how, like, it affects some people more than others. For some people, it's not something they think about daily. For some people, it's something they think about every single time they leave the house.

So, I think Howard is interesting in that aspect when those conversations do come up. But I feel like everyone across the bat, like, agrees that there needs to be some sort of form of gun safety or some conversation around that as well.

It's kind of a little bit off the topic, but I remember I went in one panel and everyone in the room was, kind of, having a discussion about whether we should be more focused on, like, grassroots works or, like, fighting for federal laws and things of that sort. We, kind of, came to the consensus, like, we need both. Like, we need people who are on the ground, who are violence interrupters, but we also need to be advocating on the national level, too, for different laws around safety.

[00:08:34] **Frank:** Yeah, I think that's right on par. It's going to be on both sides of the fence there. And you've gotten some wonderful national attention around the work that you've done. You received \$25,000 from Pharrell. You've been recognized in Teen Vogue as a 21 under 21 list, which is congratulations for that.

[00:08:51] **Kayla:** Thank you.

[00:08:52] **Frank:** Do you feel like what you're doing is starting the conversation and affecting individuals outside of just the fact that, you know, you have a device that you're working on?

[00:09:02] **Kayla:** Yeah, I think I'm definitely glad to, like, get as much attention as I've been getting. I think that also, like, in addition to me starting this conversation within gun safety, the gun violence intervention space, I think that I'm also, I'm also trying to be a role model for young people, and that if you have an idea, even if you don't have the resources at that time, if you



keep pushing for it, it'll come eventually. Like, as I mentioned, I was 12 and I ideated my idea. I didn't know anything about engineering or none of that sort of thing, but I promised myself that, like, "Okay, this is, this is, like, the one idea that I have that I know that I'm going to take far because I think that it can actually have a difference." So, there's that piece.

And then, also, I think, in the gun violence prevention space, we hear a lot about mass shootings and we think of young people, that's, like, the first thing we think of. So, with My Gun's Been Moved, I'm trying to add, like, these accidental shootings, these in-home shootings to that conversation as well, which I feel like I've been able to do through the amount of media that I've gotten in this past school year.

[00:10:01] **Frank:** Yeah, yeah. I'm glad you're using that attention for good. I know attention also comes sometimes with some criticism. Has there been any criticism to, you know, this movement you're working to create?

[00:10:10] **Kayla:** There has been some criticism, I would say mostly a few years ago, because people were like, "Why are you trying to do all this? Like, you should be playing hopscotch or go to school," people just not taking me seriously. But definitely, it was in this past year after getting the Pharrell investment, I had some people spin back with apologies and things of that sort.

But yeah, I would say, for the most part, though, I think I've gotten, like, just some random Instagram comments that, like, weren't the nicest, but overall, I would say, on both sides of the political spectrum, I've been able to see that the one thing everyone agrees on, whether when it comes to, like, banning guns and things, that's where everybody agrees about gun safety, that there should be some sort of measurement there. So, I've had, like, some guy with some large beards who were Second Amendment right advocates. And they were like, "I would buy this. Like, my... I need this in my house. I'm worried about my son." I don't know what sort of stuff he's trying to get into. So, it's just been interesting seeing that positive response on both sides, for the most part.

[00:11:07] **Frank:** That's good. That's good. So, since you're at Howard, how has the Howard community supported you?

[00:11:14] **Kayla:** The Howard community has supported me a lot. My first piece of funding, actually, came from the School of Business. I'm in the School of Communications, and I, I just love that I bombarded the SOV. But my freshman year, I was able to go into a class called Marketing for Startups, which I randomly found it on Bison web, but I was like, "I feel like this was made for me." So, I emailed the professor. I, like, searched him. It was probably 3:00 in the morning, like, I think over winter break. And the professor was Dr. Johnny Graham. So, I emailed him, and he was like, "Oh, this class is something that you have to apply to. And it's actually a pitch competition. So, in this class, we help you build your business model. And at the



end, everybody in the class gets to pitch. And the winner first place can get 10k, second place 5k, third place 3k.

And so, I was the only freshman in the class. Made it through. I placed third place, so I got \$2,000 from the School of Business corporate sponsors. And I had an idea, but I didn't have a business model. And so, being in that class really helped me develop out my ideas, write it down, be around other entrepreneurs. And then, in the summer after taking that class, I used all my assignments to apply to Black Ambition. And Dr. Graham actually had encouraged me to apply to Black Ambition as well. And then, we saw... I ended up being a prize winner. And so I'm on the... I was on the HBC U track for Black Ambition, so I was able to meet other founders from, like, Hampton, some Howard alum that are part of Black Ambition. So, it was really great to have that network, and then even just coming back to campus that might support for my peers, even like faculty on campus who have been, like, understanding of how crazy my schedule is, Howard has definitely played a huge role in my entrepreneurial journey this far.

[00:12:55] **Frank:** Yeah. And, and of course you got a fan in me. And I've been trying to express that to you since I first heard your story. So, what does success look like for you when you think about five years from now or 10 years from now? What does success look like in terms of My Gun's Been Moved?

[00:13:12] **Kayla:** So, success for My Gun's Been Moved looks like every American that has a firearm having our device in the home. That is the ultimate goal. As I mentioned, like, adding to this national conversation of what gun safety looks like, so the goal is like to partner with parent teacher organizations, other organizations who are doing gun violence prevention work. Even parent groups, that's really where I want to spark our message and also land a little bit into media. So, we have a podcast, actually, that'll be coming out hopefully very soon. So, I'm really excited to venture into the media education space as well.

[00:13:46] **Frank:** Do you have a goal percentage that you think your device could help cut down on unnecessary gun deaths?

[00:13:53] **Kayla:** Right now, I do not. But I do... I want to say 100. That's not completely accurate, but that is definitely the goal. I think that a lot of, since I mentioned 50% of gun owners aren't using gun safe, so they have no way to monitor them, to know if their child even knows where it is. And so, our device... can't say too much because we're doing through a lot of, like, product processes. But with our device, like, parents will be able to know when their gun has been moved and they'll be able to have the ability to intervene through their mobile device, which is something that has not been done yet. So, I'm really excited to get some statistics on that, and I'm really excited to see what we do in the future.



[00:14:31] **Frank:** All right. Are there any other plans or similar products or other things that you're thinking about in this space?

[00:14:37] **Kayla:** Yes, we're definitely thinking about some things.

[00:14:41] **Frank:** All right.

[00:14:40] **Kayla:** Sorry about the mystery.

[00:14:41] **Frank:** I like the mystery. I like the mystery.

Okay, so let's talk about you just as Kayla. You are multifaceted. I know we're having a conversation today about your initiative around My Gun's Been Moved, but I know you do a couple other things. Talk about a little bit about your interests and, kind of, the whole full scope of who Kayla is.

[00:15:00] **Kayla:** Yeah. So, I would describe myself, like, overall as a connector. I feel like, for some people, they're probably like, "Why do you do all these things?" And they don't seem related to me. So, I have My Gun's Been Moved, but I'm also a television and film major, political science minor. I'm a photographer, videographer, filmmaker as well. Also, a content creator. So, I do content, like, on Instagram, YouTube occasionally. So, it's a lot going on. I feel like the overarching thing and everything I do has to do with, like, connecting with people and having impact in that space. So, it's a lot going on, but it's all overarching.

[00:15:35] **Frank:** Well, last question. If you're talking to the parents out there who are gun owners, you know, what's the message you want to send to them if you have an opportunity to speak to them directly?

[00:15:47] **Kayla:** The message I would send to parent firearm owners is to store your weapons safely, and also start to have those conversations with your children about, like, what gun safety looks like. I think that parents definitely always want to be a role model, so I think it's important to be a role model when it comes to safely storing your firearms, like, showing your child what it looks like to be a responsible gun owner. I think it's extremely important. Having conversations about what a gun is, like, what the intention for it is, how you store it safely. I think that those types of conversations are really important to have with your children.

[00:16:20] **Frank:** All right. Well, you heard it here from Kayla. Thank you so much for joining our podcast.

[00:16:24] **Kayla:** Of course. Thank you for having me.



[00:16:26] **Frank:** All right. Well, this is HU2U, the podcast where we bring today's important topics and stories from Howard University right to you. I'm Frank Tramble, today's host. And thank you for listening. HU!

[00:16:37] **Kayla:** You know!

[00:16:38] **Frank:** There we go.