



STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

FACSIMILE NO.

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January 22, 2020

To: The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee

From: Hannibal G. Williams II Kemerer, Legislative Director, Office of the Attorney General

Re: HB 47 Public Safety – Handgun Qualification License – Training Exemption
(OPPOSE)

House Bill 47 amends Section 5-117.1 of the Public Safety Article to exempt Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington D.C. law enforcement officers from the firearms safety training course normally required to obtain a Handgun Qualification License (“HQL”). Under existing law, HQL applicants are exempted from the firearms safety training course if they have (1) completed a certified firearms training course approved by the Secretary; (2) completed a course of instruction in competency and safety in the handling of firearms prescribed by the Department of Natural Resources; (3) are a qualified handgun instructor; (4) are an honorably discharged member of the armed forces of the United States or National Guard; (5) are an employee of an armored car company and have a wear and carry permit; or (6) lawfully own a regulated firearm.

The vast majority of police officers in neighboring states would likely qualify for a firearms safety training course exemption under the six grounds in existing law. Therefore, this bill appears to be a solution in search of a problem. Moreover, merely because someone is a police officer in a neighboring state does not necessarily mean the person warrants an HQL qualifying exemption here in Maryland.ⁱ Different states have divergent views of who is qualified to serve

ⁱ See e.g. Glynis Kazanjian, “Questions Linger One Year After Anton Black’s Death,” *Maryland Matters* (Sept. 13, 2019), available online at <https://www.marylandmatters.org/2019/09/13/questions-linger-one-year-after-anton-blacks-death/> (noting “then-Greensboro [MD] Police Officer Thomas Webster IV, a controversial new hire

as a police officer.ⁱⁱ Many small communities have a documented history of hiring dozens of criminals as police officers.ⁱⁱⁱ In one Alaskan town, Stebbins, “all seven of the police officers working as of July 1[, 2019] have pleaded guilty to domestic violence charges within the past decade. Only one has received formal law enforcement training of any kind.” Because the vetting process for police in neighboring jurisdictions is a virtual unknown, Maryland should not exempt Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and Washington D.C. law enforcement officers from the firearms safety training course normally required to obtain an HQL. Hence, the Office of the Attorney General respectfully requests that the Judiciary Committee unfavorably report this bill.

cc: Members of the Judiciary Committee

from neighboring Dover, Del. . . was no longer able to work as a cop in Dover following a 2016 legal settlement involving an African-American suspect who had been in his custody.)

ⁱⁱ See e.g. Kyle Hopkins, “The Village Where Every Cop Has Been Convicted of Domestic Violence,” Anchorage Daily News, available online at <https://www.propublica.org/article/stebbins-alaska-cops-criminal-records-domestic-violence> (noting that “[w]ith low pay and few people wanting the jobs, it is . . . easy in some small Alaska communities for a convicted felon, even someone who has admitted to a sex crime or who was recently released from prison, to be hired with public money to work as a city police officer.”).

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.*