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FROM THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF CRIME PREVENTION, YOUTH, AND VICTIM SERVICES

February 4, 2020

Chair Luke Clippinger
Judiciary Committee
Room 101
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 356: Crimes- Firearms- Penalties and Procedures (Violent Firearms Offender Act of 2020)

POSITION: Support

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services ("Office") supports House Bill 356: Crimes- Firearms- Penalties and Procedures (Violent Firearms Offender Act of 2020).

House Bill 356 increases penalties for gun related crimes and offenses. This legislation takes a series of important steps to reduce the spike in gun violence across the State of Maryland. The bill does the following; (1) eliminates use or possession of a firearm as a technical violation to the conditions of probation, parole, or mandatory supervision in order to allow a sentence above the caps in appropriate cases; (2) permits the State to appeal trial court decisions to exclude evidence in cases involving a firearm, (3) increases the minimum sentence for individuals who repeatedly use a firearm in the commission of a crime of violence, (4) sets minimum sentences for theft of a firearm; (5) implements tougher penalties for straw purchases and removal or alteration of the manufacturer serial number; (6) restricts pretrial release for firearms offenders;

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and (7) enhances penalties for firearms offenses where an individual has a prior gang-related conviction.

The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services is committed to a Safer Maryland. Within the Office is the Maryland Criminal Intelligence Network ("MCIN"). MCIN is a criminal justice strategy, coordinated at the local, state, and federal levels targeting gangs, drug, firearms and human trafficking. MCIN's goals are focused on identifying, disrupting, and dismantling criminal networks through collaboration and comprehensive data sharing.

Stronger enforcement of firearm laws, including for crimes committed with a firearm, and theft of a firearm will help the 13 MCIN sites across the state target violent criminal networks and gangs by offering a stronger enforcement mechanism against illegal firearm possession.

This legislation is one of the keys to combating the ongoing crime problem in Baltimore City. In 2018 there were 309 murders in Baltimore City, of which 273 were committed with a firearm. In 2019, there were 348 murders committed in Baltimore, of which 312 were committed with a firearm. In addition there were 771 non-fatal shootings in 2019, an increase of 14% over the 677 in 2018. House Bill 356 equips the local State Attorney's Offices with the tools necessary to convict the individuals who traffick the illegal guns into the community.

For these reasons, the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services supports House Bill 356 and urges a favorable report.

Sincerely,



V. Glenn Fueston, Jr.
Executive Director

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