

HB-910 Criminal Law – Untraceable Firearms - SUPPORT

House Judiciary Committee

Luke Clippinger, Chair

Vanessa Atterbeary, Vice-Chair

February 26, 2020

Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
State of Maryland

Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to members of the House Judiciary Committee regarding House Bill HB-910 that prohibits persons from manufacturing firearms without proper serialization, covert or disguised firearms, and undetectable firearms.

By way of background, I believe it is important to detail some of my qualifications for presenting the testimony below. I am a retired Special Agent of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) with almost thirty-years of experience primarily in the area of firearm-related violent crime enforcement and research. During my career with ATF, I held many positions to include: Special Agent in Charge of the Intelligence Branch, Chief of the Firearms Division and Creator and Chief of ATF's Crime Gun Analysis Branch. In these three positions, I had the opportunity to conduct extensive nationwide research in areas of firearms-related violent crime reduction strategies and methods to include managing a Presidential Directive, the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative (YCGII). Upon retirement, I have consulted and provided training to numerous law enforcement agencies and was a subject area expert for the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and currently am a member of this organization's Firearms Committee. For the last eighteen years I have been employed as a Professor at Mount St. Mary's University, Emmitsburg, Maryland, which has provided me the opportunity to continue my research in the area of firearms-related violent crime reduction while teaching both traditional students and adults.

As a current member of the IACP Firearms Committee, I can attest that law enforcement across the United States are gravely troubled by criminals who are seeking the anonymity of manufacturing firearms that bear no markings and are un-serialized thus making them 'untraceable'. "Ghost guns", as they are commonly referred to, seek to accomplish exactly what the name implies, hide their makers as well as users from detection of law enforcement. Whether these firearms are manufactured in their entirety or are from component parts or from

technologies such as 3-D printers, their objective has one purpose only and that is evade state and federal background check laws and supply criminals, terrorists, and other prohibited persons firearms that cannot be traced by law enforcement or are undetectable by common methods of screening. Already we have seen large criminal operations springing up for this purpose. Just this last year, ATF and the Los Angeles Police Department seized over 1,000 firearms from an individual who was manufacturing 'Ghost Guns'. No law-abiding citizen would want a firearm that does not possess a serial number and thereby cannot be returned to them if stolen nor one that is poorly manufactured that could potentially cause injury.

With regard to covert/disguised and undetectable firearms, they pose a pronounced and direct threat to law enforcement officers who risk their lives every day to keep their communities safe. Officers confronting individuals that possess weapons that are not readily recognizable as a firearm face the danger that they will go unnoticed. Such firearms provide a criminal the opportunity to kill or severely injure an officer by deploying what may appear to be an everyday object. In my law enforcement experience, such weapons have been used by outlaw motorcycle gang members, drug traffickers, and extremely violent offenders. Although this legislation lists a variety of examples that disguised weapons can take, I can tell you the list is only limited by the imagination of the criminal. I will also note that the United States Secret Service, with their mission of protecting the President and dignitaries, is extremely concerned with criminals, terrorists, or the mentally ill who may utilize a disguised weapon that could not be readily detected visually or by metal detection. Such weapons pose a serious threat to the Services' security protocols.

I believe that this legislation is a step in the right direction of providing law enforcement with a tool that can be utilized prior to the violent use of the firearms described in the legislation. These types of weapons have no legitimate sporting, hunting or self-defense purposes, and are a threat to public safety and directly relates to the safety of our law enforcement officers. I urge you to pass this legislation.

Thank you again for this opportunity. Should you require additional information or have any questions, please contact me at any time.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph J. Vince, Jr.
Professor/Special Agent (ret.)