



**HB3 - Maryland State Police Gun Center – Firearms Surrendered  
Under Final Protective Orders  
Judiciary Committee**

**SUPPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **support** of HB3, related to firearms and domestic violence protective orders. This bill is high priority for Court Watch Montgomery. As the only organization in Maryland that collects and analyzes data about what happens in domestic violence courtrooms, we strongly support efforts to help enforce protective orders and to remove guns from the hands and homes of abusers.

The General Assembly last year established the Maryland State Police Gun Center as a statewide enforcement center for the tracking, screening and vetting of firearm crimes through a statewide database; all law enforcement agencies must now submit specified information on these crimes to the Gun Center. HB3 will expand the statewide database to include firearms surrendered pursuant to a final protective order. The bill will close a critical gap in last year’s law and help determine whether policies intended to protect domestic violence victims are effective.

As characterized by the Brady organization, guns are the “weapons of choice” in domestic violence homicides. Nationally, more than half of intimate partner homicides are committed with guns. In Maryland in 2020, guns were used to kill 100% of the intimate partners who died in intimate partner violence. These data do not reflect the additional incidence of nonfatal shootings or the use of firearms to threaten, terrorize and control victims in an abusive relationship.

Protective orders are a powerful tool to keep victims safe *if they are enforced*. In 2021, nearly 9,000 Marylanders who experienced domestic abuse were granted a final order. Both federal and Maryland law prohibit respondents from possessing firearms while a final order is in effect. However, procedures to enforce these orders, including the firearm surrender provisions, are not consistent throughout the state.

To support law enforcement in collecting guns, Court Watch Montgomery has long advocated that judges ask both petitioners and respondents about the respondent’s access to firearms, and that judges inform respondents of the obligation to surrender firearms when a final order is granted. The District Court of Maryland recommends that judges follow these best practices.

However, our data for 2021-2022 show that while judges generally inform respondents of the obligation to surrender any guns, they ask respondents if they own or have access to guns only 28% of the time.

As a data-driven organization, we believe in the use of data to support and assess the effectiveness of policy. Consistent data on the surrender of firearms in domestic violence cases, including about the types of guns and the individuals who surrender them, is essential to know if existing policies are working and whether changes in policy or practice are needed. The General Assembly last year took an important step in promoting gun safety through establishment of the Gun Center. HB3 takes a necessary step further to ensure safety for victims of domestic violence.

We ask for your support for HB3 and strongly urge a favorable Committee report.