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Testimony in Support of SJ 4 – Use of Nuclear Weapons

To the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

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The Maryland General Assembly should add its voice to those who seek to bring us back from the brink of nuclear war. Nuclear war could end civilization as we know it. Various simulations conducted by military experts, scientists, and scholars suggest that any nuclear exchange would be highly likely to lead to all-out nuclear war. Maryland, lying near Washington, DC, and containing multiple military bases, would be subject to direct strikes and to indirect damage. Some people would be instantaneously vaporized while others would be painfully and/or mortally injured. Electricity would fail and health care would be unavailable to most of us. The best estimate of the number of deaths from a full-scale nuclear war is about 5,000,000,000 (five billion) human beings – most of whom would die of starvation.

Almost eighty years have passed since the last time nuclear weapons were used in war. Some people may have a false sense that nuclear war *will* not happen because it *has* not happened in what seems like a long time. People who carefully study this frightful topic, however, say that the risk of nuclear annihilation has reached an all-time high.

An initial nuclear warhead launch can happen by accident – and once a warhead is launched, the risks to all of humanity rise by several orders of magnitude. Heightened tensions between the United States and Russia or between India and Pakistan can increase the chance of an accidental launch. Factors involved in an accidental nuclear launch could include:

- Equipment failure in warning systems
- Human error in interpreting signals from warning systems
- Mistakes and mental illness of nuclear weapons personnel.

When a signal is received, a complex cascade of automated and human responses is initiated. A faulty computer chip or other component can lead to disaster as can a faulty response by a technician in the command chain.

It is well-documented that migratory birds, satellite explosions, reflections of sunlight, civilian rocket launches, and other false signals have initiated nuclear alerts.ⁱ

While to some it may seem that the chances of a nuclear exchange can safely be ignored, the truth is that a nuclear accident is inevitable with thousands of warheads on hair-trigger alert. It could happen decades or centuries from now, or apocalypse could happen later today.

There is some good news:

- 73 nations are parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
- The California, Oregon, New Jersey, and Rhode Island legislatures and over 75 local jurisdictions have passed resolutions similar to SJ 4.

Congress and the President can bring us back from the brink. Every knowledgeable and responsible person should be engaged in this project of preserving humankind. Members of the Maryland General Assembly can support this Senate Joint Resolution 4. Your favorable report on SJ 4 will start the ball rolling toward passage. That would send a message to the President, the Congress, and other states to build an even stronger public consensus to prevent nuclear war.

ⁱ <https://www.globalzero.org/updates/seven-things-mistaken-for-an-incoming-nuclear-attack/index.html>