



Date: February 5, 2025

To: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and the Judicial Proceedings Committee

Reference: Senate Bill 443, Trafficking Regulated Firearms - Felony Classification

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope I am writing in strong support Senate Bill 443, which seeks to reclassify the illegal trafficking of regulated firearms from a misdemeanor to a felony. This legislative change is crucial to underscore the severity and harm that illegal gun trafficking causes Maryland's citizens.

As of 2022, firearms are now the leading cause of death among children and teens (ages 1-17), surpassing car crashes, overdoses, and cancers – we must act now to protect children BEFORE the violence occurs. Thoughts and prayers are not able to triage bullet wounds. In 2022, there were over 48,000 firearm-related deaths in the United States, with an average of 132 people dying from firearm-related injuries each day.

Two-thirds of guns recovered in crimes in Maryland are traced to out of state sources. Maryland now has one of the HIGHEST rates of out-of-state gun imports in the United States, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence. The problem of illegal gun trafficking in Maryland is significant. In 2020, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) traced the origin of 6,357 firearms in Maryland, and of those, 55.2% (3,509 guns) originated from out of state. This high percentage of out-of-state firearms highlights the need for stronger measures to combat illegal trafficking.

1. Enhancing Public Safety

The illegal trafficking of firearms poses a significant threat to public safety. Firearms that are trafficked illegally often end up in the hands of individuals who are prohibited from owning them, including criminals, those with violent histories, people suffering from mental illness, and those who threaten domestic violence. By reclassifying this offense as a felony, we send a clear message that Maryland is committed to taking strong action against those who contribute to gun violence in our communities or who illegally bring guns into our communities despite our very strong state laws.

2. Deterrence and Accountability

Classifying firearm trafficking as a felony will serve as a stronger deterrent to those considering engaging in this illegal activity. The reclassification to circuit court further underscores the severity of the crime of illegal gun trafficking and makes available to prosecutors enhanced and increased penalties and incarcerations. A felony ensures that those who are caught and convicted face appropriate consequences for their actions, reflecting the severity of the crime.

3. Alignment with Federal and State Standards

Many states and the federal government already classify the illegal trafficking of firearms as a felony. For example, under 18 U.S. Code § 933, trafficking in firearms is a federal felony offense, punishable by up to 15 years in prison. States such as California, New York, and Illinois also treat illegal firearm trafficking as a felony, recognizing the

serious nature of this crime. By aligning Maryland's laws with these standards, we ensure consistency and strengthen our collective efforts to combat gun trafficking.

4. Supporting Law Enforcement Efforts

Reclassifying firearm trafficking as a felony will provide law enforcement agencies with more robust tools to investigate and prosecute these crimes. Felony charges often come with enhanced investigative powers and resources, enabling law enforcement to dismantle trafficking networks and prevent firearms from reaching the illegal market more effectively.

5. Community Impact of Gun Trafficking

The impact of illegal gun trafficking on Maryland communities is profound and far-reaching. Maryland has one of the highest rates of out-of-state illegal gun imports, accounting for two-thirds of all gun crimes in the state. This influx of illegal firearms contributes to increased violence, which affects the physical, mental, and emotional health of community members. Exposure to gun violence can lead to long-term trauma, disrupt community cohesion, and create an environment of fear and insecurity. Initiatives like LifeBridge Health's "Stop the Iron Pipeline" highlight the urgent need to address this issue and its detrimental effects on our communities.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 443 represents a critical step forward in our efforts to reduce gun violence and enhance public safety in Maryland. By reclassifying the illegal trafficking of firearms as a felony, we align our state with federal and other state standards, provide stronger deterrents, and support law enforcement in their mission to protect our communities.

I urge the committee to vote favorable Senate Bill 443, given its critical importance.

For more information, please contact:

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