

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



February 10, 2025

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The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support –House Bill 713: Public Safety - Distribution of Literature to Purchasers of Firearms and Ammunition

Dear Chairman Clippinger and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1100 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) strongly supports House Bill 713, which requires firearm and ammunition retailers to provide purchasers with literature on firearm safety, training, suicide prevention, mental health awareness, and conflict resolution. This bill is a straightforward and evidence-based measure that will save lives by ensuring that firearm owners receive critical information about the risks associated with gun ownership and strategies to mitigate them.

As physicians and mental health professionals, we witness firsthand the devastation caused by firearm suicide and unintentional shootings. In Maryland, as across the nation, firearm-related injuries and deaths continue to rise, with suicides accounting for the majority of firearm fatalities. The risk of suicide is significantly higher in households with firearms, and studies show that limiting access to lethal means—including through education and secure storage—can reduce suicide rates.

The effectiveness of distributing educational materials on firearm risks is well documented. The American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Maryland Psychiatric Society have all supported public health interventions that provide firearm owners with information on safe storage and risk factors for firearm suicide. Research shows that individuals in crisis often experience only a brief period of heightened suicide risk. If a firearm is stored securely—or if an individual is simply reminded of the risks—suicide attempts can be prevented.

A similar ordinance was recently enacted in Anne Arundel County and has already demonstrated its potential. As outlined in the amicus brief filed by leading medical organizations in support of that law, studies indicate that providing firearm purchasers with written materials about suicide prevention and safe storage increases the likelihood that they will take proactive steps to secure their weapons. The amicus brief also detailed the tragic, preventable consequences of failing to educate firearm owners about these risks, including numerous cases where families expressed regret that they were never informed of the dangers their firearms posed to their loved ones.

Additionally, public health initiatives requiring the dissemination of safety information have been successful in other domains, such as seatbelt use, smoking cessation, and child car seat requirements. This bill follows the same public health model: providing firearm owners with knowledge that can prevent harm without infringing upon their rights.

By requiring that all firearm and ammunition retailers provide educational materials, HB 713 ensures that gun purchasers—whether first-time buyers or experienced owners—have access to essential information that could protect their families and communities. This is a common-sense measure that will help reduce firearm suicides, accidental shootings, and gun-related domestic violence incidents in Maryland.

For these reasons, the Maryland Psychiatric Society urges a favorable report on HB 713.

If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact MPS lobbyist, Lisa Harris Jones at lisa.jones@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee