

May 24, 2019

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker of the House
H-101 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Mr. President and Madam Speaker:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have vetoed Senate Bill 1000 and House Bill 1343 – *Public Safety – Handgun Permit Review Board – Repeal*.

Protecting Marylanders is my highest responsibility as governor. People have a right to be safe at home, work, school, and as they go about their lives. Ensuring firearms do not fall into the hands of criminals or mentally ill persons is a crucial part of this duty. Unfortunately, Senate Bill 1000/House Bill 1343 fails to do anything to improve public safety. Instead of protecting Marylanders, it threatens the ability of law-abiding citizens to appeal decisions regarding handgun permits.

This measure does nothing to prevent guns from getting into the hands of dangerous people. The majority of cases overturned or modified by the Handgun Permit Review Board were merely appeals of restrictions on permits. These were cases in which the Maryland State Police had already determined the applicants – all law-abiding citizens – did not have any concerning criminal nor mental health factors in their background. The Board itself, it is worth noting, was created by the General Assembly in 1972, and it has worked well ever since that date. This legislation appears to be just a solution in search of a problem. The General Assembly's efforts would be better focused on initiatives to target violent, repeat offenders who use guns to commit crimes. The senseless violence in Baltimore City is heartbreaking. We need solutions, such as the Repeat Firearms Act of 2019, that would ensure those who repeatedly victimize our communities are held accountable. When given an opportunity this year to adopt tougher sentences for repeat violent gun offenders, the legislature refused to act. However, abolishing the Handgun Permit Review Board is not a solution to violent crime problems. It is just another in a long series of politically-motivated and ill-conceived power grabs.

Not only would this legislation fail to improve public safety, it would impose costly barriers for law-abiding individuals who wish to exercise their due process appeal rights. Rather than allowing applicants to appeal to the long-standing citizen-led Handgun Permit Review Board that was created by the General Assembly in 1972, the legislation would have required applicants to appeal to the Office of Administrative Hearings. This move would reasonably require applicants to retain an attorney to effectively pursue this review, significantly exacerbating the cost and ability of citizens to pursue their legal rights.

Current law already provides an appropriate check on the Handgun Permit Review Board. Should either party want to appeal a decision of the Board, the law allows for the decision to be appealed to the Office of Administrative Hearings, and ultimately to Circuit Court.

Senate Bill 1000/House Bill 1343 does nothing to prevent firearms from getting into the hands of violent criminals or seriously mentally ill persons, nor would it protect Marylanders from gun violence or lower the unacceptable level of violent crime. As we have done in the past, efforts should be focused on real, substantive solutions to prevent gun violence.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Senate Bill 1000 and House Bill 1343.

Sincerely,

Lawrence J. Hogan Jr.
Governor