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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the
Maryland House of Delegates
Appropriations Committee**

**Public Safety – Education – Firearm Funding (No Funding for Firearms Act)
(HB 1078)**

February 27, 2020

SUPPORT

Maryland PTA is the state's oldest and largest child advocacy organization that serves as a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families, schools and communities and a strong advocate for public education. We represent thousands of volunteer members in 900 public schools and we are comprised of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business as well as community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and family engagement in Maryland. For nearly 105 years, our mission has been to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

Maryland PTA submits this testimony in support of House Bill 1078 ("HB 1078"). This bill would prohibit a county board or public school from spending money from any source to directly or indirectly provide a teacher with a firearm or train a teacher in the use of a firearm. HB 1078 would exempt school-approved sports or clubs from its coverage.

Both the National PTA and Maryland PTA (collectively "PTA") have a history of advocating for the safety of children and youth. PTA is committed to federal and state efforts to protect children and youth from gun violence and strongly believes legislation must be enacted that will help prevent future tragedies from occurring while preserving the lawful use of firearms for sport and personal protection. Additionally, PTA advocates for restricting access to guns from persons who may endanger public safety.

Any effort to improve the safety of our nation's youth and our communities must be comprehensive and include gun safety and violence-prevention measures. Conversations about school safety, gun safety, and violence prevention cannot be limited to video games, violent programming, and mental health. Our nation's leaders must acknowledge and address the ease of access to firearms and assault weapons. We must make every attempt to reduce violence, especially those incidents that involve firearms.

PTA promotes the establishment of and support for legislation that improves youth and community safety and restricts guns to only responsible owners. Practical gun safety and violence prevention legislation will protect not just our children but all Americans from gun violence while at the same time respecting the rights of law-abiding gun owners. We must all work together to end gun violence. Among other safety measures, PTA advocates for the appropriate evaluation and wrap-around services

for students who have brought a firearm to school, and robust education programs to teach students, parents, and community members about gun safety and violence prevention.

According to a 2018 article in *Education Week*, some educators say they do not want the responsibility of carrying and securing a firearm on top of their already demanding jobs. Many teachers believe that arming themselves and their peers would make schools less safe. Additionally, all the major teacher, principal, school employee, and school security organizations oppose guns in schools, except when carried by a police or security officer. A 2015 CBS News/New York Times poll found that 57 % of all respondents opposed allowing teachers and staff to carry guns in schools.

Recent surveys of educators found most educators think carrying a weapon in school is a bad idea. Teach Plus, a national advocacy group for teacher leadership, polled 1,233 teachers and found nearly 80% strongly oppose arming teachers in school. The National Education Association (“NEA”) surveyed 1,000 of its members, and 82 % of respondents said they would not carry a gun to school even if they had firearms training and were allowed to do so. A Gallup poll found less than 30% of teachers think that arming teachers would be very or somewhat effective in limiting the number of victims in a school shooting.

A 2018 *neaToday* article pointed out that law enforcement experts agree that school staff should not carry guns, because they lack the tactical knowledge of handling weapons that trained law enforcement personnel receive on a regular basis. Educators carrying weapons pose too high a risk to school safety. The NEA publicly opposed arming teachers in a 2018 episode of the *PBS News Hour*.

While Maryland PTA respects the opinion of those who believe arming teachers will save more lives during a school shooting, we cannot support the use of public funds to weaponize or deputize educators. The opposition and reluctance within the educator profession alone is enough to support prohibiting local jurisdictions from spending money to arm teachers. Further, the cost of arming teachers exceeds the purchase and training. It can reasonably be expected that liability risks will increase significantly. Local school systems will be subjected to possible litigation should a teacher accidentally or mistakenly injure a student.

If the concern is school safety, PTA believes that gun violence can and will decrease through education, prevention, and awareness. Adoption of safety measures will make our communities, as well as our schools, safe for everyone. PTA believes we must enact common sense legislation that will reduce gun violence and help protect all children and youth while protecting the lawful use of firearms for sport and personal protection. Accordingly, Maryland PTA recommends a favorable report on HB 1078.

Respectfully Submitted,



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President