



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Testimony of the Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr.
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Public Policy Network
Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
IN OPPOSITION to SB 198
Public Safety - Permit to Carry, Wear, or Transport a Handgun – Qualifications
January 30, 2020

To Chairman Smith, Vice Chairman Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial
Proceedings Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to SB 198.

Non-violence is at the core of Christian faith and practice. The teachings of Jesus – as contained in the New Testament – call the faithful to a rejection of a system of retribution and righteous violence and into an alternative way of living that is based on unconditional love of neighbor and accountability for the common good.

We cannot normalize violence or contemplate its use ever as being for the right. And, we do not believe that the answer to escalating gun violence is an increase in the number of guns on the street.

Our bishops have called for common sense gun safety measures that enjoy the support of gun owners and non-gun owners alike: handgun purchaser licensing; background checks on all gun purchasers; restrictions on gun ownership by domestic abusers; classification of gun trafficking as a federal crime; encouragement for the development of “smart gun” technology; and, federal funding for research into gun violence prevention strategies – long overdue. And, our Church has passed numerous resolutions calling for many of these measures.

It is the opinion of our Public Policy network, that this bill serves only to undermine the existing concealed carry standards of the State, making access to handguns that much easier and increasing the likelihood that they will be placed into the hands for those who should not carry in the first place. Further, we believe this bill creates the same slippery slope created by the ‘stand your ground’ laws enacted by numerous states.



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The *Tampa Bay Times* has done a superb job of documenting nearly 200 cases in which defendants asserted Stand Your Ground claims, resulting in dismissals 70% of the time. In nearly a third of the cases, explains the *Times*, “defendants initiated the fight, shot an unarmed person or pursued their victim – and still went free.” Judges appear uncertain about the boundaries of the doctrine, and court outcomes are inconsistent. Defense attorneys now make Stand Your Ground claims in hundreds of cases per year. They have a strong incentive to do so, because the burden of proving the defendant did not feel threatened now falls on the prosecution.

In short, Stand Your Ground laws encourage the use of deadly force. These laws open the door to a more dangerous world where everyone feels pressure to carry a gun – and if they feel threatened, to shoot first and tell their stories later. There is a fine line that we cross when we abandon our current requirement to retreat before using deadly force. This bill, we believe, would encourage armed persons to be more aggressive in meting out their own form of justice, whenever they did not like the looks of this person, or felt threatened by another. There are George Zimmermans living in every community.

We request an unfavorable report.