

Oppose SB208

Rifles and Shotguns-Secondary Transactions

Art Novotny
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Right now, you are probably hearing my oral testimony that we all agree that no one wants “bad” people to get guns, but we oppose this bill because it has the potential to entrap otherwise good people who would never attempt to break a law.

I will not have time to speak about examples, but please consider this:

I would have run afoul of this law myself a few years ago, while trying to do the right thing. My best friend, who is a modest gun collector, unexpectedly found his old house sold before his new house was ready to move into. He and his wife stayed at a friend's, where there was not room for his gun collection. Obviously, he wanted to keep his guns locked up, not hidden under a mattress or somewhere unsecured. So the logical solution was to keep them in a safe at my house. Had this bill been a law at the time, we would have had to take all of them (a dozen or so) to a gun store and pay to have them transferred to me, then pay to reverse the process two months later. Or, we would both be guilty of a misdemeanor that carries a penalty high enough that we would both lose all of our guns, forever. He may have been better off risking them getting stolen...which is the last thing anybody wants.

My beloved Harford County is not the idyllic rural sanctuary I wish it was. We have had our share of manhunts for scary people, such as the murderer of Sheriff's Deputies Logsdon and Dailey in 2016, the shootings at Advanced Granite Solutions in Edgewood in 2017, and when Officer Amy Caprio was murdered in 2018. There were tense hours (days, sometimes), when all we knew was that determined killers were on the loose. If they had asked, I would have gladly lent my neighbors a shotgun to protect their children in their home. It appears that SB208 *might* permit that, with a catch:

One of the exemptions (5-204.1.(5)) allows a loan “That is temporary and necessary to prevent imminent death or serious bodily harm if the transfer lasts only as long as necessary to prevent imminent death or serious bodily harm”

The catch is, how do we determine when it is no longer necessary to “prevent imminent death...” It sounds like I can lend my neighbors (who I trust, and know are not prohibited) a shotgun to protect their family while there are killers running around the backyard, but as soon as the killers are apprehended and the danger is gone, they have to give it back. Right away? What if I'm at work? How long of a grace period do we have before my neighbors and I are both criminals?

These may sound like very esoteric examples, but that is exactly the kind of tiny catch we are afraid of because the stakes are so high. We want to keep our squeaky clean records so we can remain law abiding citizens. One tiny slip up can shatter that coveted status instantly, and ruin lives.

You'll also hear (if you haven't already) how this will destroy juniors shooting programs where rifles are lent to families for practice and competition. Unsupervised kids and guns certainly don't mix on the streets, but kids who are taught how to shoot safely at the range learn valuable life lessons in discipline, safety, maturity, and drive for success. Have you ever heard of a "bad kid" who was part of a shooting program?

In the testimony against the house version of this bill, I heard an idea from a young man that really stuck with me. He suggested making it easier for us to do background checks ourselves. Now, I don't speak for all gun owners about this, and, in fact, I may lose some friends over it, but I think that is a fantastically simple solution.

Give us access to our own "DIY" background checks, with something like an app, where I can scan the driver's license of someone I may want to sell or lend a rifle to. It doesn't need to record any personal information. They can keep their privacy. I would just need a "proceed" or "do not proceed" response. We don't need to go back and forth to a gun store, and the net result is still the same. Make it easy for us to comply.