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*Written Testimony of Katie Novotny in Support of HB 356*

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February 4, 2020

I am a member of Multiple Gun Rights organizations. Maryland Shall Issue, Associated Gun Clubs, Maryland State Rifle and Pistol Association, and the National Rifle Association. I am a certified Range Safety Officer with the NRA. I compete in multiple shooting events such as Steel Challenge, 3-gun, small bore, and vintage military rifle matches. I am an avid firearms collector. I am a citizen of the state or Maryland who wishes to see criminals actually punished for their behaviors, and to see crime reduced. I support HB 356.

This bill is sorely needed. The revolving door of the criminal justice system in this state is appalling. From an article published by the Baltimore Sun (<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/crime/bs-md-ci-gun-arrest-prosecutions-20161022-story.html>), When people are caught with illegal guns, a quarter of them have charges dropped before going to trial. Upon convictions, defendants receive an average sentence of 16 months, with a large portion of their sentence suspended. Police say the number is much lower, about 6 months. Also, the article states that the Prosecutor says that when convicted of having a gun in a vehicle illegally, that only 6% of the total sentence is served, 15% is served for carrying illegally, and only 25% of a sentence is served for a felon possessing a firearm. The article goes on to discuss some of the issues faced in prosecuting these crimes, and the failures to address this issue.

Of note in this bill are the increased penalties for theft of a firearm. Under current law, this is treated as simple theft. The penalties do not even disqualify the perpetrator from purchasing a firearm in the future. I think common sense would tell us that this should be a disqualifying crime. I still find it disappointing that under this bill, the penalties for first time theft of a firearm are still less than loaning a firearm, as spelled out in HB4.

This bill elevates most crimes related to illegal use of a firearm to felony from a misdemeanor. It also states mandatory minimum sentences. All of these are important tools to keep violent criminals off the streets. Mandatory minimum sentences can eliminate personal bias in sentencing. All who commit specific crimes are treated equally. There are no penalties that are too lenient or harsh based upon sympathy or prejudices. Keeping our most violent offenders off the streets does prevent crime. They cannot commit murder in our neighborhoods if they are in jail. Our laws must have teeth in order to be effective.

This session alone, this body has proposed numerous laws that primarily affect legal, innocent activities. There has been legislation focused on long guns, which are almost never used in crime. This bill aims to actually make real progress in the fight against crime using firearms, targeting those who are actually using them in crime. If we sincerely wish to have an impact on violent crime in this state, we must pass this bill.

Because of these reasons above, I request a favorable report.

Katherine Novotny

District 7

443-617-7568

Katie.Novotny@hotmail.com