

DATE: February 5, 2020
BILL NO.: House Bill 302
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
TITLE: *Criminal Law – Deadly Weapons on School Property – Nonpublic Schools*
POSITION: Oppose

Testimony from: Bradford V. Sharpless
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Registered Democrat, District 10

HB 302 seeks to extend to nonpublic schools the prohibition on the possession of “a firearm, knife, or deadly weapon of any kind” that currently applies to public schools. This bill represents a solution in search of a problem. Under Maryland law, there are very few individuals other than law enforcement personnel who can legally carry a firearm outside the boundaries of their private property. In the process of addressing a non-existent problem, the bill generates new issues. Banning knives and the ill-defined category of “deadly weapons” from nonpublic school property creates the following specific challenges for me:

- 1) I am a Cub Scout den leader. Our den meets in a private Catholic school, with the associated parish serving as our chartering organization. The prohibition proposed by HB 302 would prevent us from being able to meet our curriculum requirements that include instruction on the safe handling and use of pocket knives.
- 2) I am a member of the Knights of Columbus. The bulk of our council activities take place in a private Catholic school and in the church that is physically connected to the school. HB 302’s proposed prohibition would prevent the Knights from being able to use cutlery in the school’s kitchen when preparing food for social or charitable functions. The proposed prohibition would also prevent Knights of Columbus color guard members from carrying their uniform swords on school and church property.

I request an "unfavorable" vote on HB 302.