

Written Testimony of Destini Philpot

SUPPORT HOUSE BILL 910

TO: Chair Luke Clippinger, Vice-Chair Vanessa Atterbeary & Members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Destini Philpot, Baltimore, MD (District 43)

DATE: February 26, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to share my views with you. My name is Destini Philpot. I'm a 19-year-old non-binary person from Baltimore City, a leader with Baltimore Students Demand Action, and a survivor of gun violence.

It was around the age of 3 that I first remember tracing a healed bullet wound on my father's stomach, not knowing what it was. At the age of eight, shots rang out from a park that I had been at with my siblings, all too familiar sounds. I was lifted off my feet by my sister and remember seeing a trail of blood flowing into the storm drain.

As members of this committee, you're aware of the gun violence crisis we have in Baltimore and across our state and across our country. Ghost guns may not seem to be a big part of that crisis right now, but it's a problem that's growing quickly, and is going to make the crisis worse if we don't do something about it now. In DC, police have seen an exponential increase in ghost guns recently. In all of 2017, they only recovered three ghost guns from crime scenes. By the next year, it was up to 25, and last year, they found 115 ghost guns in DC.¹ Already in California, 30 percent of all guns now recovered are unserialized ghost guns.²

Across the country, and especially in Baltimore, we not only have a gun violence crisis, we have a crisis of unsolved shootings. When police find a gun at a crime scene, they can use the serial numbers to do a trace to learn about where it came from and about gun trafficking patterns. With ghost guns, they can't, which means they have no leads and there will be even more unsolved murders. In American cities hit hard by gun violence, the odds that police will solve a shooting are "abysmally low and dropping."³ Already, people who shoot someone are about half as likely to be arrested as people who kill or assault someone with other weapons.

Just like with gun violence, the burden of unsolved shootings disproportionately impact black and brown communities. According to FBI data, the entire decline in the "solve rate" for murders since the 1980s seems to be explained by a drop of more than 20% in the murder clearance rates for black and brown victims. When someone is shot and killed, white victims can expect an arrest 53% of the time, but if the victim is Black or Hispanic, the arrest rate is only 35%.⁴

The systemic failure to solve gun crimes isn't just heartbreaking for families and communities, it fuels more violence. Shooters walk free, getting away with their crimes, people lose faith in the police, and some decide to try to find

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<https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/21109272/dc-recovered-115-ghost-guns-in-2019-up-from-25-the-year-before>

² <https://www.thetrace.org/2019/05/ghost-gun-california-crime>

³ <https://www.thetrace.org/features/murder-solve-rate-gun-violence-baltimore-shootings>

⁴ <https://www.thetrace.org/features/murder-solve-rate-gun-violence-baltimore-shootings>

justice on their own. Baltimore's murder clearance rate is among the worst in the country.⁵ There are already too many unsolved murders in our city without making investigations more difficult, which the proliferation of ghost guns will do.

My city is not bad, my city is broken. But it is through my city that I am able to stand here today and tell pieces of my story that has come from it. Most people have a choice to remain silent against injustice and hate. Youth living in Baltimore today do not have that luxury. What we are experiencing right now is a generational curse that stems from systemic oppression and institutionalized racism and a history of underinvestment. Gun violence has been passed down to us. In our communities, in our schools and in our homes, we are tired of having to fight for our lives.

We have a lot of work to do in Maryland to fix our gun violence problem. Gun traffickers can make a lot of money selling ghost guns, especially in states like ours with stronger gun laws. We cannot and will not wait for the next generation to fix this. We will no longer stand idly by and allow for a system that values guns more than children dictate whether or not we deserve to live. The laws that we enact as a state say something about our priorities—untraceable, undetectable firearms pose too great a risk to the safety of our communities and should be prohibited. This is now a time of action and I'm asking you today to support House Bill 910.

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/investigations/where-murders-go-unsolved>