



**Testimony in Support of
Election Law - Polling Sites - Firearm Prohibitions
HB 30
Legislative Director Karen Herren, JD
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence**

Jan 17, 2022

Dear Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence is a statewide grassroots organization dedicated to reducing gun deaths and injuries throughout the state of Maryland. Our work ranges from addressing data-driven legislative change, leading a violence intervention and prevention coalition, and running programs for at-risk children. Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence supports the passage of House Bill 30 which seeks to prohibit firearms at official polling sites in the state of Maryland.

Across the United States, polling places are heavily regulated sites. Designed to encourage the democratic process to play out in a fair and equitable manner, polling sites are meant to create an “island of calm” for voters. (Minnesota Voters Alliance v. Mansky (2018) 138 S.Ct. 1876). All states, including Maryland, prohibit electioneering at polling places. (Md. Code, Elec Law §16-206(b), Md. Code Regs § 33.17.06.10). This includes a prohibition on campaigning, displaying signs, or even wearing campaign clothing. But as extremist groups increasingly seek to use firearms to intimidate in public spaces, the likelihood of the presence of gun-toting group members turning up to intimidate voters grows.

“There is a substantial and long-lived consensus among the 50 States that some restricted zone around polling places is necessary to serve the interest in protecting the right to vote freely and effectively.”

Supreme Court in Burson v. Freeman, 504 U.S. at 191

The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that there were 15 hate groups in Maryland in [2020](#). The motivations for these groups include general hate, anti-muslim, anti-immigrant, radical catholicism, KKK, and white nationalist. The Department of Homeland Security has deemed white supremacists as “the most persistent and lethal threat in the [Homeland](#).” We know that instances of armed intimidation at the polls are increasing. Armed rightwing supporters questioned voters at polling places and protested outside of a Democratic campaign office with firearms in Virginia during the 2016 election. In 2018, a Pennsylvania man was arrested for threatening to “shoot up” a polling place. In North Carolina, a Black campaign volunteer was accosted by an armed man at an early voting location for the 2018 [election](#).

Bright line rules were developed regarding campaigning at polling sites to make the rules easy to enforce. One simply isn’t allowed to do the enumerated items. The same should be true for voter intimidation with firearms. Prohibiting firearms in these spaces helps to preserve the “island of calm” that allows democracy to proceed as intended. MPGV urges the committee to vote **FAVORABLY** on HB 30.