



POSITION STATEMENT

TESTIMONY PRESENTED TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 861 – PUBLIC SAFETY - FIREARM CRIMES - ENFORCEMENT CENTER, OFFENSES, AND PROCEDURES

Sponsor – Senator Beidle, et al

March 30, 2022

**DONALD C. FRY
PRESIDENT & CEO
GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE**

Position: Support

Senate Bill 861 would alter the classification of certain crimes involving firearms, establish the theft of a handgun as a felony, expand the types of cases in which the State may appeal from a decision of a trial court, and establish that certain offenses of “use of a firearm” does not include mere possession. It would also establish the Maryland State Police Gun Center within the Department of State Police as a statewide firearms enforcement center for the tracking, screening, and vetting of all firearm crimes committed in the state. The Center would track the number and type of firearms used in crimes of violence, the jurisdictions where crime firearms are recovered, information regarding the individual found in possession of the crime firearm, and the sources of the crime firearms recovered, if discoverable. The Center would also assist with firearm enforcement and firearm violation reduction efforts.

In 2021, Baltimore City recorded 338 homicides, marking the 7th year in a row where the city suffered more than 300 homicides. Shootings were the cause of death in the vast majority of cases. In 2022, Baltimore City is currently on track to suffer 340 homicides. Of the 51 homicides that have taken place this year, approximately 46 of them have been the result of shootings.

The level of violence in the state, and in particular Baltimore City, is unacceptable and substantive changes are required to improve public safety and ensure economic vitality and competitiveness and increase security among Maryland citizens. Improving public safety has been identified by the Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) as a key economic growth issue that needs to be urgently addressed.

The GBC has recommended a two-pronged approach to reduce violent crime. The first prong addresses crime control through enhanced public safety programs focused on repeat violent offenders and better coordination among law enforcement agencies. The second prong - crime prevention - must be instituted simultaneously with the crime control efforts. It is critically important to address the root societal causes of crime with programs that address poverty, lack of employment, need for job training programs, and an increase in after-school programs, etc. The GBC supports these types of initiatives with the same weight afforded the crime control strategies.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) supports Senate Bill 861 as an important step in improving public safety in the region by providing another tool to law enforcement to deal with the scourge of violent crime. Individuals who use firearms in conjunction with a crime of violence should be punished to the fullest extent of the law to dissuade the proliferation of these actions. In addition, centrally tracking firearms involved in criminal activity and making the data available for law enforcement agencies to coordinate in their efforts to reduce violent crime is a common sense solution. The bill’s inclusion of an annual appropriation is an important component in ensuring that the center receives adequate and consistent funding. The GBC contends that this legislation will make a tangible difference toward improving public safety throughout the State of Maryland.

For these reasons, the Greater Baltimore Committee urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 861.

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a non-partisan, independent, regional business advocacy organization comprised of hundreds of businesses -- large, medium and small -- educational institutions, nonprofit organizations and foundations located in Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Howard counties as well as Baltimore City. The GBC is a 67-year-old, private-sector membership organization with a rich legacy of working with government to find solutions to problems that negatively affect our competitiveness and viability.

GREATER BALTIMORE COMMITTEE

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