

Good day, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Julio Barreto. I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 1 (SB1), The Gun Safety Act of 2023.

Similar to the Montgomery County legislation which the County Council approved, Bill 21-22, I believe SB1 is ill conceived and will not increase public safety as advertised. I believe it will place law abiding citizens in greater danger and embolden the criminal elements which prey on our communities.

I have been a Maryland and Montgomery County resident for almost 40 years and a gun owner for the last several years and have been issued my wear and carry permit. I am also a member of Maryland Shall Issue and support their comments in opposition to this bill. The issuance of my wear and carry permit by the Maryland State Police (MSP), after an extensive background check, demonstrated that I am both a law-abiding citizen and responsible enough to carry a firearm for self-protection. Now politicians are reacting to certain situations looking to create political points as opposed to salving real problems.

I have spent my professional career representing local governments in various capacities including drugs, crime and community policing issues, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/julioabarretojr/>. I am very familiar with the issues elected officials are trying address. SB1 does not do that. It places individuals like me and my wife, both in our 60s, at greater risk to the criminal elements who by definition do not comply with the law.

The 100 foot seems to be an arbitrary figure designed to prevent law-abiding citizen from being able to protect themselves against bodily threats. Most attackers will come within 100 foot to do harm to someone. I have yet to see any justification for the 100 foot ban. There is no evidence the wave of armed violent crime in Maryland, or throughout the country, is perpetuated by licensed wear and carry holders who are otherwise law abiding citizens. None of the crime statistics reveal whether the perpetrator of a violent crime with the use of a firearm is a licensed owner or simply a criminal illegally in possession of a firearm.

Currently, I work with a developer in West Baltimore where we redevelop homes in distressed neighborhoods in Park Heights, Harlem Park and Mt. Saint Clare. Our mission is to create homeownership opportunities for first-time buyers and also assist new or novice investors interested in real estate development. Many of the neighborhoods are distressed saddled with crime, drug trafficking and other illicit activity. These neighborhoods are littered with vacant properties which are used to stash drugs, as havens for drug use, shelter for the homeless and a stain on the community. In order to revitalize these neighborhoods we recognize there is a certain amount of risk someone in real estate has to expect. Personal protection is critical in these areas because police response to violent crimes are usually after the fact. When the criminal element realizes you do not fear them, they leave you alone. Many assume we are armed for why else would we venture into these neighborhoods, in their minds, if we are not armed and willing to

protect ourselves. As a result, we have few problems and can navigate freely. The Baltimore City chief attorney has essentially said he does not want people like us out and about in his community. We are actually making a difference in some of the city's poorest and most dangerous areas. Being armed provides a measure of protection before police arrive on the scene.

Second, SB1 places greater pressure on local and state police to respond in rapid fashion to dangerous incidences at a time when police departments nationwide are experiencing high rates of retirements, low retention rates and a smaller pool of qualified candidates to patrol the streets. I was born and raised in the Bronx in New York City and I have seen first hand how a moment of tranquility can turn to chaos in a matter of seconds. While I have tremendous respect, admiration and support for the police and law enforcement, police response time in those seconds of chaos can seem like an eternity. Life and death can hang in the balance in those seconds. If I am in one of those situations waiting for police to arrive, carrying a firearm for self-protection can be the difference between living and dying.

I understand why the public has faith in the police's ability to protect them when in need. However, the unfortunate incidences in California, Buffalo, New York, and Uvalde, Texas to name a few, illustrate potential victims cannot always expect police to respond in sufficient time to prevent a potentially deadly situations from occurring. In Uvalde, Texas and in Parkland High School police presence on site could not prevent those situations from having dire circumstances.

Additionally, the Warren vs the District of Columbia decision made it clear police have no obligation to protect members of the public. Therefore, I must take responsibility to protect myself when a situation arises and there are no police to prevent a situation from being dangerous or deadly. yet both the County and the State do not want me to protect myself or my family. The police can't be everywhere and to the extent possible, I should be able to protect myself to the maximum extent possible, even if deadly force is necessary.

Third, SB1 will place greater pressure, responsibility and increased expenses on local businesses to increase security in and around their establishments. I am within a mile of two supermarkets which have high rates of theft, muggings and attempted car jackings in the last year or so. There has been a murder and several shootings instances within a mile of our home. These incidences have increased steadily over the years. At 65, I am not he same person I was at 25 although my ego would like to convince myself I can take on a 25-year assailant on my own. The truth age and illness has taken its toll on my body. I need to ensure I can protect myself and my family if the need calls for it.

Fourth, the bill does not address many of the issues which allows crime to flourish like poverty, homelessness, drug use/trafficking and the illegal sales of firearms. Addressing those issues will do more to protect citizens than to treat law-abiding citizens as if they are either criminals or may become criminals. For those who commit crime, there are plenty of laws on the books to held them accountable for their actions.

Finally, I am angry and distressed that some politician gets to make a judgment about me simply because I am willing to take on the responsibility of being a gun owner. And it is a responsibility one I took seriously enough to allow the State Police to investigate my background, interview me and those who know me and get trained on the proper use of a firearm. Maybe some of these politicians should take the time to pursue a firearms license and experience the requirements needed to become a gun owner, especially a person who wants to carry publicly.

Gun owners are taught strict safety rules and understand firearms are used only for hunting and self-protection when the use of firearms for safety purposes is the last resort. We are all taught that the best gun fight is the one you are not a part of and during active shooter situations your first responsibility is to remove yourself from potential danger not attempt to be a hero.

In closing, I am against passage of this bill. It will give the criminal elements free reign over the streets of Maryland, it will not create a safer state for me and my family and it will deny me a constitutional right granted to me by the Supreme Court. Vote no on SB1.

Thank you.