

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

BILL NO: Senate Bill 185
TITLE: Maryland State Police Gun Center – Firearms Surrendered Under Final Protective Orders
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: February 7, 2023
POSITION: FAVORABLE

Senate Bill 185 would expand the role of the Maryland State Police Gun Center to require every law enforcement agency to report to the Center information about firearms surrendered pursuant to a final protective order. The Human Trafficking Prevention Project at the University of Baltimore School of Law supports this bill because it would be the first step in analyzing whether our current system of protective order gun surrendering is effective, which is a crucial step in ensuring the safety of survivors of interpersonal violence, many of whom are also survivors of human trafficking.

One of the most common safety tools victims of interpersonal violence (IPV) use is the protective order. Every final protective order requires the respondent to surrender their firearms to law enforcement. Advocates working with survivors of IPV have long been concerned that respondents are not surrendering any or all of their firearms as required by law, and there have been several high profile cases where respondents shot and killed their victims after failing to do so. Currently, different law enforcement agencies have different protocols for tracking the surrender of firearms. In a recent attempt to remedy this disconnect, the Maryland General Assembly passed SB 861, which created the Maryland State Police Gun Center. The Center is “a statewide firearms enforcement center for the tracking, screening, and vetting of all firearm crimes committed in the state.” HB 3 would expand the role of the Center to require each law enforcement agency to report to the Center information about firearms surrendered pursuant to a final protective order. It would be the first step in analyzing whether our current system of protective order gun surrendering is effective.

The lethality of the combination between IPV and firearms cannot be overstated: the presence of a firearm in an intimate partner violence situation increases the risk of homicide by at least 500%, while 44% of mass shootings between 2008 and 2013 involved intimate partners.¹ Women are especially vulnerable when it comes to the deadly intersection of domestic violence and gun violence, with approximately 1,000 women murdered annually by intimate partners, two-thirds of them killed with guns.² Even when not used in an episode of deadly gun violence, firearms are commonly used by abusers to control, terrorize and intimidate their victims. A survey by the National Domestic Violence Hotline found that for IPV survivors whose abusers had firearms, 10% said their abuser had fired a gun during an incident of interpersonal violence, 22% said their abuser had explicitly threatened to kill them, their children, families, pets, friends, and/or to commit suicide, and 67% said they believed their abusers were capable of killing them.³ Senate Bill 185 is a step towards lessening this deadly risk by providing us with data about whether Maryland is effectively getting firearms out of the hands of those who would do their victims harm in final protective order cases. For these reasons, the Human Trafficking Prevention Project supports Senate Bill 185, and respectfully urges a favorable report.

*For more information, please contact:
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¹ National Center Against Domestic Violence, *Domestic Violence and Firearms* (2016), <https://ncadv.org/blog/posts/domestic-violence-and-firearms>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*