

February 4, 2023

RE: Senate Bill SB0001 Criminal Law – Wearing, Carrying, or Transporting Firearms – Restriction Act (Gun Safety Act of 2023)

Dear Committee Members,

The proposed Senate Bill 0001 is not only unconstitutional and in direct defiance of the Supreme Court, it is also unsupported by any evidence of making a difference in criminal activity in Maryland. If implemented, it will not have an effect on crime or violence but will only effect law-biding citizens. It is an attempt to address the feelings not actual well-being of citizens.

It has not been long since the ruling in the Bruen case by the Supreme Court has come down. Since then, there has been a large increase in the number of Wear and Carry Handgun Permit (WCHP) applicants in Maryland. Having happened so soon, there is no data to support or contradict the effects of this sudden change. It is unknown if this decision was good or bad. What we do know, however, is criminals can no longer assume the advantage when encountering an unsuspected armed citizen. Maryland has put in place very good requirements for obtaining a permit which teaches the laws, responsibilities, and use when carrying a firearm. This knowledge and the right to carry a concealed weapon legally is helping make more law abiding citizens confident in their ability to protect themselves and others.

So what brings us here? Fear.

On one hand you have citizens who fear being around armed law abiding citizens. The fear of being in a public place wondering if the armed citizen intends to harm someone. The fear of a person taking the law into his hands instead of waiting for police. The fear of there being more firearms available in the publics' hands. To these people, firearms are seen as man's evil creation which only purpose is to cause violence.

On the other hand, you have law abiding citizens who fear the imminent threat of death or severe bodily harm. The fear of not being able to protect family and other innocent lives before help arrives. The fear of losing one's rights. To these people, firearms are seen as tool and equalizer available to assist in preserving their life.

It is agreeable, on both sides, there is a group of people who have little or no fear - criminals. Criminals do not fear retaliation from law abiding citizens because of the anti-gun culture we live in. In most cases, mass shootings and violent attacks, which we see in the media, happen where strict gun control has been established – a school, a mall, a place of worship. Criminals know they are less likely to be stopped in these areas because there is no threat to them until police arrive. These attacks are not being done by permit holders carrying a firearm. If this bill is intended to reduce these acts of violence, it has already failed. Only those who respect the law, who want to do the right thing, will suffer from this. Criminals who will not follow this law.

I have had the honor of applying for and obtaining my WCHP for Maryland. In order to apply, a mandatory 2 day 16 hour course had to be taken. Fingerprinting and background checks were also part of the process. In the course, taught by former police, I learned the necessary skills to handle, operate, and effectively use a firearm to defend myself, and others, in the event of an attack. This invaluable knowledge taught me the importance of being a responsible firearm carrier and, more so, the importance of always being prepared to defend myself and others. The time, money, and effort someone puts into obtaining a WCHP is not worth jeopardizing by being unlawful. It is too common these days for people to fear what they do not understand and do everything in their power to control that fear. I encourage everyone whether

pro or anti-gun to take a class like this - to learn about firearms - to become more aware of their purpose - to better understand.

The more educated people can be about the proper use of firearms and training, the more likely crime will be prevented. The more focus and resources spent on the root problems, the more likely crime will be prevented. Targeting law abiding citizens – trying to do the right thing – is not the solution. This bill will not make people safe, it will only make people "feel" safe and only those who are not knowledgeable of firearms for personal protection. I encourage you to reconsider Senate Bill 001 by realizing how ineffective it will be in making people safer and deterring crime and violence.

Everyone can agree something needs to be done to stop crime and violence. Living in a society where a person can take another's life for a reason other than self-defense is intolerable. Some of us may be parents who would do anything for our children's safety. I pose a question to anyone who has lost someone during a violent attack and to anyone with a family: If you were legally carrying a firearm with your loved one during what could be the final moments of your life, would you not do everything in your means to stop the threat? This bill will make the means impossible.

Respectfully,

Joe Kotlar