

SHELLY HETTLEMAN
Legislative District 11
Baltimore County

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
and Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 203
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3131 • 301-858-3131
800-492-7122 Ext. 3131
Shelly.Hettleman@senate.state.md.us

The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB159
MARYLAND VOLUNTARY DO NOT SELL FIREARM REGISTRY

SB159 is a suicide prevention effort that empowers those who may be experiencing a serious mental health crisis. It is a way to prevent an opportunity to inflict self-harm and lethality at a time when someone is most vulnerable. This bill enables someone to voluntarily put themselves on a list so that they are prohibited from purchasing a firearm at a time when they may be at heightened risk for suicide. It is our hope, and many individuals who suffer from episodic mental illness tell us, that when individuals with mental illness are in periods of stability, they would take this effort to protect themselves.

Firearms are the most common means used for suicide, making easy access to them a highly concerning matter for public health.¹ Public health data demonstrate that purchasing a gun and bringing it into your home—especially for first-time gun buyers—significantly increases the risk of suicide approximately threefold.²

On average, 265 Marylanders die of a firearm suicide each year, with suicide accounting for 36% of gun deaths in our state.³ Even more concerning, the Maryland firearm suicide rate has recently risen – declining in 2018 and 2019, from 45% to 43% respectively, to 52% in 2021. Unfortunately, some of the highest rise is among Black men.⁴

While approaches like this voluntary self-prohibition are new, 3 states have recently passed laws: Washington, Utah, and Virginia. Since 2021, 33 people have placed themselves on the list in Virginia and 30 remain – you have an option to remove yourself from the list.

A 2017 survey of 200 individuals receiving treatment at both in and outpatient psychiatric clinics asked participants if they would put their own names on a “Do Not Sell” list to voluntarily waive their right to purchase a firearm. 46% of respondents said yes.⁵ This is a significant number of people, in this study conducted in Alabama, who desired restricted firearm access for their own well-being.

¹ <https://www.kff.org/other/issue-brief/do-states-with-easier-access-to-guns-have-more-suicide-deaths-by-firearm/>

² <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>

³ <https://everystat.org/#Maryland>

⁴ <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2022/gun-deaths-spiked-during-the-pandemic>

⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27704597/>

In gambling, we enable Marylanders to put themselves on a list to restrict their access to casinos – why shouldn't we do the same here – where the stakes are even higher? In fact, according to the Maryland Lottery and Gaming Control Agency, 1,074 individuals have opted for a lifetime ban from gambling while 1,624 have a 2-year prohibition – self-induced.

It is imperative that Marylanders have the opportunity to restrict their access to firearms ahead of time if they know it will protect them in a time of crisis. We enable certain people to raise red flags about others via our Extreme Risk Protection Order program (ERPO), why shouldn't we enable individuals to raise those red flags for themselves?

I urge a favorable report on SB 159, and I thank you for your consideration.