



March 07, 2023

House Judiciary Committee,
Chairman, Luke Clippinger

Support for HB0856 – Correctional Services – Baltimore City Convicted Gun Offenders Pilot Program

Attention Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Moon and members of the committee:

I am writing to express my **support for HB0856 – Correctional Services – Baltimore City Convicted Gun Offenders Pilot Program.**

This bill will enhance the policies and prosecutorial goals of the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office by adding an additional tool in our toolbox of holding offenders accountable while also offering them individualized treatment and/or rehabilitative programming upon conviction of their crime.

As you've heard from me on several occasions this session, gun safety is a cornerstone of my administration, and I will continue to push for common sense policies that keep the citizens of this great state, and the city that I represent, safe from the harm that can come from irresponsible gun owners and/or those who obtain these weapons by illegal means.

The hardest part of my job as State's Attorney is hearing the horror stories from the families of those who have had their loved one's life tragically cut short at the hands of someone with a firearm. And while holding offenders accountable by effectively prosecuting them for the crime they have committed is my central mission as the city's state prosecutor, the second hardest part of my job is seeing lives wasted by decisions made that now have them entangled within the criminal justice system.

As an elected representative of constituents who aren't always on the right side of the law, I have a duty to do what I can to assist in their daily growth, including offering rehabilitative services to those who may have broken the law, to help ensure that they do not reoffend in the future. HB0856 is a bill that will allow our criminal justice system to do just that, offering individualized treatment services and guidance to those who have been convicted of a gun crime.

Increasing penalties for illegally wearing, carrying and/or transporting a firearm, which I have offered up to you with HB0481, is only one piece of the preventive cycle I am focused on. The other is diversionary and rehabilitative programming that begins to address the systemic issues that plague our society, especially that of communities of color. According to a recent Department of Justice study, weapons arrest rates are five times greater for African Americans than they are for whites, thereby proving that we have to begin to address the racially systemic issue of gun violence in cities like Baltimore.



Often times these offenders are faced with alternatives that are detrimental to their future regardless of their decision, and in situations such as this, we have to do what we can to ensure the best possible outcome by offering them a way out of those predicaments by holding them accountable for their actions, but offering them an opportunity to redeem themselves through programs such as this.

I will continue to be vocal in my pursuit of ending gun violence by any means necessary, but that is not a one-way street paved with penalties. We have to begin addressing the root cause of crime, while getting at the heart of why over the past decade in Baltimore City, nearly 90% of all homicides were caused by gun violence. There is no magic solution to the problems we face, but we have an opportunity to offer alternatives to what we've been doing by supporting common-sense, progressive approaches to public safety like HB0856.

I would urge a favorable vote on this bill, and thank you for your time and consideration. I pray for your continued health and well-being, and I appreciate the service you provide to our great state, along with the level of engagement and commitment you provide to our communities on a daily basis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Ivan J. Bates".

Ivan J. Bates, Esq.
State's Attorney for Baltimore City