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Honorable Elected Officials:

This is to acknowledge that I am a law abiding trained/CCW firearm citizen and submit this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill: 1 and HB 824. My name is Emerson A. Watts Jr. I am a native of Maryland, and for 21 years I have been a resident of Clinton Maryland, located in Prince George's County.

I am a 66 years old married African American male, and decorated Air Force Retiree with 21 years of service. Having been raised by strict parents from St. Michaels, Md., I was not introduced to firearms until I joined the military in 1974. At 18 years old, I joined the military and like others was trained to shoot a M16 rifle. In 1975 I was deployed to the Middle East on a peace keeping mission all in the name of Democracy. In the name of freedom, I was trained in firearms and task with defending others.

At the age of 66, I continue to be disappointed by the hypocrisy practiced by many of Maryland's elected officials. The same elected officials that are silent when 17 or 18 year olds are sent off to war to fight and die for their country. Yet, when those Veteran return home the same officials, openly oppose those Veterans their constitutional rights to self-protection. I honorably served my country for 21 years and was trained and qualified in firearms, mainly the M16 rifle. I would greatly appreciate if one of the elected officials could explain to self how disarming trained and honorably retired Veteran make us safer. How is disarming Veteran and turning law abiding citizens into criminals constitutional, does this make Maryland safer. Why are retired police officers exempt when military personnel that take an oath like police officers are not exempt. Most military retirees are typically trained more than the average police officer.

I honorably served America and love my country, like so many other law-abiding Americans. I have given much to ensure the freedom of people, foreign and domestic. I proudly fly on my property two flags, American and the USAF flags. I legally hold firearm permits from 5 different states including Maryland. Yet, Maryland in the state where I was born and made my home is the most restrictive. Those who are to represent me have come to deny me when it comes to upholding my rights as a lawful gun owner.

There is a big misconception as to one firearm type and its capability over another. Reality is the M16 rifle in which I was initially trained by the military is a real assault weapon. While it has the capability to shoot a rapid rate of fire, wherein the semi-automatic civilian AR15 has been falsely labeled by many elected officials as an assault rifle. Such misinformation has caused confusion and fear leading many to think the worst of law-abiding gun enthusiasts.

I believe in my God given constitutional rights of self-protection. Senate Bills: 1 and HB824, deprives all law-abiding citizens of their rights and needless-to-say are unconstitutional, unpatriotic and un-American. I am my own first responder, like so many others loyal law-biding American citizens, we have earned our rights for self-protection. Unarming law abiding citizens will only embolden criminals as they

do not respect or comply with laws. It sends the message that the legal law-abiding citizen should not be entrusted with the right or responsibility to ensure their own safety or that of family. In all honesty, gun control has little to do with safety, never has and never will.

I think you will hear from many giving testimonies today how the proposed bills are a disservice and disenfranchise a certain group of people. The consensus, at least from a significant number in my community, is that firearms are mainly about controlling predominately, people of color. I think it is not a coincidence that most of Blue controlled states or cities with dense populations involving people of color are subject to laws that are anti-Second Amendment, for them. By way of history, this country (and namely the state of Maryland) has been widely known to codify laws (via systematic changes) denying people of color the right to own firearms.

Certain rules should not infringe upon the rights of those who are just and do the right thing. I pay taxes, care for my family without a handout from anyone. I honorably served my country, why not allow law-abiding citizens the rights they deserve? The Constitution is very clear on the Second Amendment, "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." I think it imperative that we be reminded that a firearm is a tool, like any other. It can be used for good or evil. It is the human that determines how any tool will be used, not the tool itself.

If you do a google search of "the ten most racist states in the US" Maryland come up on the list as number one. We know who these new gun laws are meant to target, it's the same play book. Just like the early racist drug laws, a certain group will not be given a pass, they will be profiled and targeted. Maryland gun laws are so cryptic many Attorneys and law enforcement don't understand them. During my attendance at the SB1 hearing, I observed the author of the bill didn't have a clue about his own bill. What I find alarming is that so many other Democratic elected officials would co-sign these ridiculous and unconstitutional bills. Especially knowing who this law will target. A quick look at the new Montgomery County gun law, who has it targeted? Has crime gone down and how many real criminals; not made criminals, did you stop?

Seriously, You are putting into law one of the most restrictive and expensive carry permit systems in the country. It is one of the highest permit fees and lowest renewal periods in the country. This entire law is anti-law abiding and pro criminal. If you must be first at something, how about trying education or low taxes and stop wasting our tax money on the law suits that will follow. I was hoping Maryland would continue the legal path of Governor Hogan but I can see Maryland has a history of being forced to do the right thing. I am not a Trump fan but thank God for our current Supreme Court.

Elected officials you have an opportunity to do the right thing, uphold your duly sworn office and the Constitution. The Supreme court opened the door allowing Maryland an opportunity to move away from its oppressed and biased gun laws. The prevailing question is "when did America stop being a land of freedom?". I am appealing to you to show some courage, all those with the power to do so please oppose Senate Bill 1,. This bill will embolden the criminal and do little or nothing to make Maryland citizens safe.

Thanks for taking the time to let me state my case, stay safe and God Bless you all.

Respectfully,

Emerson A. Watts Jr.

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Law Abiding Citizen