

**Testimony for the House Ways & Means Committee
February 21, 2023**

HB 580 – Election Law-Polling Sites- Firearms Prohibition

FAVORABLE

Madame Chair Atterbeary, Madame Vice Chair Wilkins, and committee members,

My name is Melissa Ladd and I live in Olney, Maryland in District 14. I am formally submitting my written testimony in support of HB 580 on Firearms Prohibition at Polling Sites.

As you know, Maryland currently allows the open carry of a handgun by a person with a permit to wear, carry, or transport a gun.¹ We also know that it is permissible for the Maryland State Police to limit the geographic area, circumstances or times in which a handgun carry permit is effective.² Polling sites should be a circumstance and time under which firearms should be prohibited.

The right to vote is the most fundamental right afforded to citizens of a free country. Voter intimidation is a crime under federal law and under state law in Maryland. The United States Supreme Court wrote “the display of a gun instills fear in the average citizen.”³ Firearms in such a space as a polling place act as a tool of intimidation and embolden extremists.

The Maryland General Assembly should act now to ensure that no voter is fearful or intimidated when exercising their most fundamental right. In the current divisive times, it is crucial that we provide security to all participating in elections. By enacting HB 580, the General Assembly will eliminate the potential for terror and intimidation, and ensure dialogue and debate can ensue instead.

Sincerely,
Melissa Ladd
Chapter Leader
Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Maryland Chapter

¹ Md. Code Ann., Crim. Law § 4-203(a), (b)(2)

² Md. Code Ann., Pub. Safety § 5-307(b)

³ **McLaughlin v. United States, 476 U.S. 16, 17-18 (1986)**