



**TESTIMONY FOR SB0179
Penalties and Procedures
Violent Firearms Offender Act of 2024**

Bill Sponsors: Senators Watson, Carozza, and Muse

Committee: Judicial Proceedings

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Aileen Alex, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0179 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists, and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

Crime rates are surging, making this a priority issue for the Governor Moore and the Maryland Legislative Coalition. According to Axios, Baltimore now has the fourth highest gun homicide rate in the country as of 2022.

The Violent Firearms Offender Act, resubmitted from last year's session, makes the commission of a crime with a firearm a felony instead of a misdemeanor. The bill also would increase penalties for illegal use of a firearm to a minimum sentence of five years, ten years for each additional offense. MLC strongly supports bills directed at reducing the use of guns in commission of a crime.

Despite this emphasis on gun-related crime reduction, this bill also provides for better reentry services for former inmates. Before release of an incarcerated individual from a state correctional facility, the Commissioner of Corrections is to furnish contact information for entities that specialize in reentry services, housing assistance, substance use disorder treatment, and mental health services along with information on Medicaid or the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange. MLC supports efforts that would reduce recidivism and help former inmates become productive members of society.

Therefore, the Violent Firearms Offender Act of 2024 could lead to two beneficial outcomes: a reduction in the use of guns in the commission of crimes and the successful reentry of former inmates.

The Maryland Legislative Coalition supports this bill and recommends a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.