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BILL NO: SB753

TITLE: Public Safety – Firearm Background Checks, Victim Notification, and the Maryland State Police Gun Center

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

HEARING DATE: February 27, 2024

POSITION: Favorable

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Alicia Bickoff. I am the Deputy Director of CHANA, an agency of the Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore. I am testifying in favor of HB0869 - Public Safety – Firearm Background Checks, Victim Notification, and the Maryland State Police Gun Center. CHANA is a domestic violence, sexual abuse, and elder abuse agency that serves the citizens of Baltimore County and City. CHANA provides safety planning, emotional counseling, sheltering and legal advocacy. We also collaborate with the Baltimore Police Department to respond to all lethality assessments in the Northwest Precinct.

One of the core services that CHANA provides is safety planning. Safety planning is a highly customized and ever evolving process between the advocate and the victim. It relies on the unique circumstances, risks and experiences of the victim to create a plan to mitigate harm. It is constantly being practiced, adjusted and refined based on the information that is available to both the victim and the advocate. If a victim were to learn that their abusive partner had filed for a gun license, that critical information would be immediately incorporated into their safety plan. It would show that their abusive partner lacks concern with violating the terms of their protective order. It would be an indication of escalation and growing risk of lethality as the presence of a firearm makes it five times more likely that a woman will die at the hands of a domestic abuser. The victim may choose to move their custodial exchanges to a police station or a supervised visitation center, rather than a store parking lot. They may decide to notify an employer or a school so that they can call the police if the abuser is on the premises. They may re-start safety practices that they had retired such as packing a safety bag in case they need to flee rapidly, changing the driving routes or even relocating permanently. Without accurate, current information, a victim cannot proactively keep themselves safe. For the state to have this information and not share it with the victim would be to tie that victim's hands and put them in more harm unnecessarily.

We ask you to support this bill so that our clients can receive the full information that they need to protect themselves and plan for their safety.