

---

**SB 753**  
**Favorable**

**TO:** The Honorable Will Smith, Chair  
Senate Judiciary Committee

**FROM:** Spencer Cantrell  
*Senior Advisor for Implementation, Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions*

**DATE:** February 27, 2024

**RE:** Senate Bill 753: *Firearm Background Checks, Victim Notification, and the Maryland State Police Gun Center*

---

I am here today in enthusiastic support of Senate Bill 753, the Firearm Background Checks and Victim Notification bill, and the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions urges a **favorable** report on this legislation.

As the Senior Advisor for Implementation for the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, I am very happy to support this legislation. Our Center conducts and translates rigorous research to inform effective policy solutions, and develops, advocates for, and implements equitable and innovative policies and programs to end the epidemic of gun violence. This bill would assist with furthering these goals by protecting victims of domestic violence and the broader community.

If a respondent in a final protective order attempts to purchase a firearm from a licensed firearms dealer (which would automatically be a violation of the final protection order), then this bill would require the firearms dealer to report the attempted purchase to the state police. The state police would then be required to transmit that information to law enforcement and also provide notice of the attempted purchase to the victim in the protection order. This notice would occur by using the VINE system, which automatically notifies victims through email and telephone alerts they can enroll in. Many victims/ survivors of domestic violence are already otherwise enrolled in the VINE program, and this is a system that victim advocates are already quite familiar with.

This bill works to close a critical implementation gap of notifying authorities when individuals are attempting to purchase firearms in violation of current law. By providing law enforcement and petitioners/ victims with this information, it allows for law enforcement to follow up with the respondent if needed to ensure compliance with the order. More importantly, it gives the victim information which may be critical in safety planning, since the respondent's attempt to purchase a firearm could be a signal of an escalation of violence.

This bill also requires data collection statewide including how many individuals fail background checks and why. This will allow for further analysis of individuals attempting to purchase firearms and potentially further improve implementation.

Notably, this bill does not create a new crime, but rather works to close an implementation gap by holding prohibited individuals accountable when they attempt to purchase a firearm.



Research from my colleagues at Johns Hopkins has shown the clear risk presented by abusive partners having access to firearms; research shows that when abusers have access to firearms, women are five times more likely to be murdered by an abusive partner.<sup>1</sup> This threat also puts the wider community at risk; another colleague's research has shown that in two-thirds of mass shootings, the shooter either killed family or partners as a part of the shooting or had a history of domestic violence.<sup>2</sup>

As discussed by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV), Maryland is a partial point of contact state- meaning that some background checks are completed by the FBI and some by the Maryland state police. While federal law requires the FBI to notify local law enforcement of attempted purchasers that fail background checks, this same notification requirement does not extend to state background checks.

Notifying victims or petitioners in protection orders when an abuser is attempting to purchase a firearm is key information for a victim who would likely need to do additional safety planning if the Respondent is attempting to unlawfully purchase a firearm. Prior to my role at Johns Hopkins, I worked as the Legal Director of a domestic violence non-profit in Maryland and represented victims of domestic violence in court. I would often work with victims/ survivors on safety plans, and often these safety plans would evolve around moments where the victim perceived additional risk; these were often very real risks. If I worked with a victim of domestic violence and the abuser was attempting to unlawfully purchase a firearm, I would have a serious conversation with them about additional urgent steps they may want to take to ensure their safety. However, if the victim isn't informed, they are deprived of the critical agency they need to ensure their and their family's safety.

In my current role as a Senior Advisor for Implementation, I often work with jurisdictions around the country around effective implementation of firearm removal laws. Ensuring that prohibited individuals do not obtain weapons is a key part of this. This bill ensures that the protection order prohibitions are being properly implemented in a victim-centered way.

Accordingly, the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solution respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on **Senate Bill 753**. Thank you for your time, and I am available for any questions.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.93.7.1089>

<sup>2</sup> <https://injejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330-0>