

BILL NO: House Bill 869
TITLE: Public Safety – Firearm Background Checks, Victim Notification, and the Maryland State Police Gun Center
COMMITTEE: Judiciary
HEARING DATE: February 21, 2024
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

House Bill 869 would require notification to the victim if a prohibited person such as a person who has an Order or Protection active against them, seeks to obtain background check in order to purchase a gun. It would also require the State Police to notify the Maryland State Police Gun Center if it does not approve a gun background check. The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) supports HB 869 because we hope it will reduce intimate partner gun violence.

Right now, gun background checks are performed either by the NICS/FBI or by the State Police. Under HB 869, the State Police must notify a local law enforcement agency if a prohibited person tries to legally purchase a firearm and is denied, regardless of which agency performed a background check. The victim of abuse would also be notified. Having such knowledge might be vitally important to preventing further abuse or even death at the hands of their abuser. It would also place local law enforcement on notice of the potential danger. Notification to law enforcement has been required under VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) since 2022 for background checks done via NICS.

The risk of homicide for women increases by 500% with the presence of a gun in the home. In Maryland, there were 56 domestic violence fatalities in 2022 and 75% of those deaths were caused by a firearm. HB 869 does not change who a prohibited person is or alter the process for purchasing a firearm. It simply assures that victims know their abuser has sought to purchase a firearm, allowing the victim to make a safety plan, while also informing local law enforcement so they can decide whether to take any action.

For these reasons, the WLC urges a favorable report for HB 869.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to ensure the physical safety, economic security, and bodily autonomy of women in Maryland. Our mission is advanced through direct legal services, information and referral hotlines, and statewide advocacy.