



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of House Bill 935: The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act
February 22, 2024

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee, I humbly come before you today to offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 935: The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act**.

Gun violence is a public health crisis. It continues to devastate our communities and remains the number one cause of death for children in Maryland. This crisis, particularly impacting our young Black boys, demands urgent and decisive action. We have had great progress across Maryland in reducing gun violence cases, thanks in part to targeted resources addressing the root causes of crime and violence, paired with healing support systems through our trauma centers and community/family interventions. Even so, the funding for these programs and resources is not guaranteed. To ensure a safer Maryland, we must secure sustainable funding through new revenue streams. Comprehensively addressing the treatment and prevention of gun violence, along with the trauma on our children, families and communities is worth all the resources we can offer.

The bill establishes an 11% excise tax on the gross receipts of a federally licensed firearms dealer derived from sales of firearms, firearm accessories, and ammunition in the State. **The bill** specifies the distribution of revenue from the excise tax, administration of the excise tax by the Comptroller, filing of excise tax returns by licensed dealers, and the paying of excise taxes by licensed dealers.

In *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, Inc. v. Bruen* (2022), the Supreme Court confirmed the constitutionality of modern firearms regulations so long as they are “consistent with the Second Amendment’s text and historical understanding.” (*Id.* at 2131). For decades the firearms industry has been subject to a federal level excise tax on firearms and ammunition under the Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937, with the proceeds from that tax directed towards offsetting the harm the industry has on wildlife conservation efforts. **The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act** was designed to conform with the legal precedent established by this longstanding law, as well as the Supreme Court’s jurisprudence.

It is estimated that this excise tax will generate \$18.7 million in annual revenue in FY26, increasing to \$24.3 million annually by FY29. After an era of continuous record profits from the gun industry, the **Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act** redirects a portion of those profits for community well-being. The bill funds critical services addressing gun violence treatment and prevention, including:

- 44% to the Maryland Trauma Physicians Services Fund;
- 29% to the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center at the University of Maryland Medical System;
- 23% to the Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund within the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention;
- 2% to the Survivors of Homicide Victims Grant Program within the Governor’s Office of Crime and Prevention and Policy; and
- 2% to the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention within the Maryland Department of Health.

A 2018 study by the Giffords Law Center found that gun violence in Maryland costs us over \$1.3 billion per year, \$294 million of which is funded entirely by taxpayer dollars. Gun violence imposes an especially burdensome cost on Maryland trauma centers. Since gunshot wounds require immediate medical attention from multiple medical specialists, trauma centers must pay a team of doctors to remain on standby at the hospital. This represents a much greater cost to the hospital than having off-campus physicians that are on call. Furthermore, the trauma patients that stay the longest are statistically those recovering from gun violence. These factors together make gun violence one of the biggest financial burdens to Maryland trauma centers. **This bill** asks the firearm industry to redirect a small portion of their massive profits to shoulder some of this financial burden.

As we tackle the treatment and prevention of gun violence, we must embrace innovative, new programs and solutions. This bill provides funding for Governor Moore's recently established Center for Firearm Prevention and Intervention, the first such center in any state nationwide. The bill would also provide funding for the Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund and the Survivors of Homicide Victims Grant Program. The **Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act** provides enhanced financial support for these programs in their commitment to addressing both the root causes and impacts of gun violence.

On October 6, 2020, my father was shot randomly in his car in Washington D.C., and I am grateful to the wonderful team at GW trauma for healing him. The healing for myself, however, came from the support of family, friends, and the community. Catching the criminal who shot my father didn't help me recover. Taking the illegal gun used to shoot my father didn't help me recover. While the trauma centers healed my father's physical wounds, the emotional damage inflicted on him, and my family required healing from the community. **The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act** embodies a holistic approach to gun violence treatment and prevention – addressing the root causes of gun violence while treating both the victim and their family.

The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act does not seek to penalize businesses but asks them to do their part in contributing to the betterment of our communities. It embodies an all-in community approach to addressing the trauma of gun violence.

I ask for a favorable report on **House Bill 935**.

Bernice Minck North