

**TO:** The Honorable Will Smith, Chairman  
*Judicial Proceedings Committee*

**FROM:** Spencer Cantrell, JD  
*Assistant Scientist, Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions*

**DATE:** February 17, 2025

**RE:** SB 943- Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act

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My name is Spencer Cantrell, and I am an Assistant Scientist at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. **This testimony represents my strong support of SB 943 Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act - a critical bill that will improve the court's ability to ensure protections for victims and survivors of domestic violence by strengthening firearm surrender provisions in protective order cases.**

Prior to joining Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, I spent most of my professional career working in support of victims and survivors of domestic violence. Firearms were a common challenge in my work with clients as an attorney and victim advocate. Clients were too often threatened by their abuser with a firearm, and the known presence of a firearm in the home or an abuser's access to a firearm often shaped my client's safety planning, from thinking of leaving to their abuser and for years on, as some victims/ survivors would continue to co-parent with their abusers for years to come. Some clients, who I have not seen in years, are people I think of frequently: a client whose abuser was in law enforcement and so when she called the authorities, they dismissed her concerns and would not take a report. I remember another client who was impoverished and too afraid to file for child support because her abuser, the father of her child, had threatened to kill her and her children with a firearm if she ever took him to court for any reason. I'll never forget safety planning with my client who was nine months pregnant about what she would do if the abuser showed up to the maternity ward with a firearm. The challenges and fears of an abuser with firearms were an unfortunate common through line in this work.

The research on the impact of firearms in domestic violence is consistent with what I saw in my work with individual victims and survivors and overwhelmingly shows the importance of consistently removing firearms from domestic violence abusers. Research shows that nearly half of all female homicide victims in the U.S. are killed by current or former intimate partners.<sup>1</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Tobin-Tyler E. Intimate Partner Violence, Firearm Injuries and Homicides: A Health Justice Approach to Two Intersecting Public Health Crises. J Law Med Ethics. 2023;51(1):64-76. doi: 10.1017/jme.2023.41. Epub 2023 May 25. PMID: 37226755; PMCID: PMC10209983.

2022, 56 Marylanders—ranging in age from 1 to 67 years old—lost their lives in domestic violence-related incidents.<sup>2</sup> Of these fatalities, 75% of all domestic violence homicides involved a firearm.<sup>3</sup> Domestic violence affects more than the victims of abusive relationships; many of Maryland’s domestic violence deaths were bystanders killed in shootings, and 30 children were left behind by victims of domestic violence in 2022.<sup>4</sup> Domestic violence has ripple effects on entire communities. We also know that most mass shooters have a history of committing domestic violence.<sup>5</sup>

The problem is more than clear. However, there are concrete, definitive steps that we can take to make victims of domestic violence and our entire communities much safer. Domestic violence protective orders that require firearm removal are associated with a 12% reduction in intimate partner homicide and a 16% reduction in firearm intimate partner homicide.<sup>6</sup> When domestic violence protective orders firearm restrictions cover ex parte orders, not just final protective orders, there is a 13% reduction in intimate partner homicide and a 16% reduction in firearm intimate partner homicide.<sup>7</sup>

Under current law, gaps in enforcement mechanisms create dangerous loopholes that allow abusers to maintain access to firearms even after a protective order is issued. SB 943 closes these gaps by:

- **Mandating the surrender of firearms** for respondents subject to both temporary and final protective orders, ensuring immediate risk reduction.
- **Providing clear protocols** for judges and prosecutors to track compliance, issue contempt orders, and take actions against respondents who have not surrendered their firearms.
- **Enhancing interagency coordination**, ensuring law enforcement, judicial officials, and victim service providers effectively communicate and share critical information.

Removing firearms from domestic violence incidents is not just a precaution—it is a proven, life-saving intervention. This bill ensures that Maryland is doing everything possible to prevent tragedies before they occur.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Geller, L.B., Booty, M. & Crifasi, C.K. (2021). The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014–2019. *Injury Epidemiology*.

<sup>6</sup> Zeoli AM, McCourt A, Buggs S, Frattaroli S, Lilley D, & Webster DW. (2018). Analysis of the strength of legal firearms restrictions for perpetrators of domestic violence and their associations with intimate partner homicide. *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

<sup>7</sup> Zeoli AM, McCourt A, Buggs S, Frattaroli S, Lilley D, & Webster DW. (2018). Analysis of the strength of legal firearms restrictions for perpetrators of domestic violence and their associations with intimate partner homicide. *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

By requiring courts to obtain and act on firearm access information, SB 943 proactively reduces the risk of domestic violence incidents involving guns. This measure helps prevent homicides, injuries, and escalating violence, ultimately saving lives. Consistently documenting firearm possession creates a clear legal pathway for removing guns from individuals who pose a threat, closing dangerous enforcement gaps that might otherwise allow abusers to retain access to deadly weapons.

Accordingly, I respectfully request a **FAVORABLE** committee report on **SB 943**.