



Date: February 5, 2025

To: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and the Judicial Proceedings Committee

Reference: Senate Bill 444, Public Safety - Gun Buyback Programs - Destruction of Firearms

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Smith and Committee Members:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope I strongly support Senate Bill 444, which seeks to establish a responsible framework for gun buyback programs in Maryland. This bill represents a crucial step towards reducing gun violence and enhancing public safety in our communities.

As of 2022, firearms are now the leading cause of death among children and teens (ages 1-17), surpassing car crashes, overdoses, and cancers – we must act now to protect children BEFORE the violence occurs. Thoughts and prayers are not able to triage bullet wounds. In 2022, there were over 48,000 firearm-related deaths in the United States, with an average of 132 people dying from firearm-related injuries each day.

Two-thirds of guns recovered in crimes in Maryland are traced to out of state sources. Maryland now has one of the HIGHEST rates of out-of-state gun imports in the United States, according to the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

### **Gun Buyback Programs Work**

Gun buyback programs have been implemented in various cities and states across the United States with the primary goal of reducing the number of firearms in circulation. These programs offer several key benefits:

- 1. Reduction in Firearm Availability:** Gun buyback programs can provide a safe and anonymous way for individuals to surrender firearms and reduce the overall number of guns in the community. This can lead to a decrease in the likelihood of firearms being used in crimes, accidents, or suicides.
- 2. Public Awareness and Education:** Gun buyback events often serve as platforms for raising awareness about the risks associated with firearms and promoting safe storage practices. They provide an opportunity to educate the public on the importance of responsible gun ownership and the potential dangers of having unsecured firearms in the home.
- 3. Community Engagement:** Gun buyback programs foster collaboration between law enforcement, community organizations, and residents. This bill encourages partnership by establishing a framework for a community organization to partner with law enforcement or other group to facilitate the destruction of firearms. By working together, communities can build trust and develop comprehensive strategies to address gun violence and its root causes.
- 4. Cost-Effective Violence Prevention:** While the empirical evidence on the direct impact of gun buybacks on reducing gun violence is mixed, the relatively low cost of these programs compared to other violence prevention initiatives makes them a worthwhile investment. Even if a single life is saved or a single crime is prevented, the benefits far outweigh the costs.

### **Examples from Other States and Countries**

Several states and countries have implemented gun buyback programs with varying degrees of success:

1. **Australia:** Following the Port Arthur massacre in 1996, Australia implemented a mandatory gun buyback program, resulting in the surrender of over 650,000 firearms. This program is credited with significantly reducing gun violence and mass shootings in Australia.
2. **New Jersey:** In 2019, New Jersey's gun buyback program collected over 2,000 firearms in a single day across multiple locations. The program was part of a broader effort to reduce gun violence and promote public safety.
3. **California:** Los Angeles has conducted several gun buyback events, with thousands of firearms turned in over the years. These events are often held in partnership with community organizations and offer incentives such as gift cards in exchange for firearms.
4. **Maryland:** Maryland has had success in gun buybacks. Community members anonymously and voluntarily turned in their firearms, receiving \$100 food store gift cards for functioning handguns, rifles, and shotguns, and a \$200 food store gift card for functioning military assault-style weapons and privately manufactured firearms ("ghost guns"). All firearms were accepted with no identification requested and a no-questions-asked policy by law enforcement. The August 2024 Rockville event yielded 270 firearms, with all cosponsors deeming the event a huge success.

#### **Why We Favor Senate Bill 444 -**

Senate Bill 444 is designed to establish and facilitate responsible and effective gun buyback programs in Maryland. The bill includes several provisions that ensure the program's success:

1. **Mandatory Destruction:** The bill requires that all firearms surrendered through the program be destroyed, including all components and parts. This ensures that these weapons are permanently removed from circulation and cannot be misused.
2. **Collaboration:** While SB444 requires the entity hosting the buyback to destroy the guns, it allows for the entity sponsoring a buyback to partner with law enforcement or another organization to help satisfy the requirement, thus making it easier for any entity to sponsor the buyback program, as they do not have to do the destruction themselves.
3. **Accountability:** For anyone hosting a buyback, they would be required to destroy the weapons; failure to do so would be in violation of SB444, resulting up to \$10,000 in fines, and loss of a dealer's license.

Every gun turned in is one less gun that could be used in a serious crime, homicide, suicide, or domestic violence incident, or accidentally discharged by a child. Keeping guns off our community streets, out of the hands of our youth and out of our schools are our highest priorities. This bill will create great opportunities for any person who would like to dispose of an unwanted firearm voluntarily, anonymously, and safely.

For all the above stated reasons, we request a Favorable report for Senate Bill 444.

For more information, please contact:

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