



### Domestic Violence Legal Clinic

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Bill No.: Senate Bill 943  
Bill Title: Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act  
Committee: Judicial Proceedings  
Hearing Date: February 19, 2025  
Position: **FWA**

House of Ruth is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George's County, and Montgomery County. Senate Bill 943 would broaden the circumstances under which respondents in protective order cases are required to surrender firearms. **We urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to amend and favorably report on Senate Bill 943.**

Currently, the protective order statute requires respondents to surrender firearms after issuance of a final protective order. Courts may order a respondent to surrender firearms at the temporary protective order stage under certain circumstances and in the discretion of the judge. Senate Bill 943 would expand the current law to require surrender of firearms upon issuance of any temporary protective order, as well as upon issuance of an interim protective order.

A significant feature of the bill as drafted is a list of questions to add to the protective order petition about the respondent's possession of firearms and matters related to firearm use, such as whether the respondent hunts, goes to a firing range, and lives with people who are aware of the respondent's possession of firearms, to name a few. While we laud the intended purpose of these questions, we are deeply concerned about the negative and potentially dangerous impact these questions may have on victims of domestic violence. We fear that victims will be at greater risk of harm when their abusive partners find out that they are working with a domestic violence agency and disclosed these extensive, personal details about the respondent. In addition, we are concerned that many petitioners will feel intimidated by the long list and either abandon filing for a protective order altogether or refrain from mentioning the presence of firearms in order to avoid answering the questions. House of Ruth worked with other domestic violence advocates and the bill's sponsor to suggest amendments that remove almost all of the questions, except the few that directly get at the presence of firearms and their location. The draft amendments include a provision that the courts provide information to petitioners about domestic violence service providers, which we also support.

**The House of Ruth urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to amend and report favorably on Senate Bill 943.**