

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



February 10, 2025

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The Honorable William C. Smith
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support –Senate Bill 943: Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) and the Washington Psychiatric Society (WPS) are state medical organizations whose physician members specialize in diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. Formed more than sixty-five years ago to support the needs of psychiatrists and their patients, both organizations work to ensure available, accessible, and comprehensive quality mental health resources for all Maryland citizens; and strive through public education to dispel the stigma and discrimination of those suffering from a mental illness. As the district branches of the American Psychiatric Association covering the state of Maryland, MPS and WPS represent over 1100 psychiatrists and physicians currently in psychiatric training.

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS) strongly supports Senate Bill 943, the Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act, which enhances Maryland's protective order process by improving firearm surrender requirements for individuals subject to these orders. This bill represents an essential step in strengthening protections for survivors of domestic violence and reducing the risk of firearm-related harm, including homicide and suicide.

Gun violence and domestic violence are inextricably linked. More than half of all intimate partner homicides in the United States are committed with a firearm, and research shows that the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by fivefold. Additionally, many perpetrators of domestic violence also pose a suicide risk. Access to a firearm during a period of crisis significantly increases the likelihood of a fatal suicide attempt, and in many domestic violence-related murder-suicides, the shooter has a documented history of abuse. Ensuring that those subject to protective orders do not have access to firearms is a proven, life-saving measure.

Maryland's current law does not go far enough in ensuring that firearms are removed from individuals subject to protective orders. As it stands, law enforcement officers can only seize weapons that are in plain view, limiting their ability to enforce protective orders effectively. SB 943 corrects this dangerous loophole by requiring the surrender of firearms and handgun qualification licenses when a protective order is issued. This ensures that when a judge determines that someone poses a risk to their partner or family, there is a clear legal mechanism to remove their firearms and prevent further violence.

Additionally, this bill strengthens the reporting process by requiring petitioners to provide information on firearms the respondent owns, where they are stored, and other relevant details. While this additional information will make protective order motions more detailed, it is a necessary enhancement to ensure that courts and law enforcement have the tools needed to enforce these orders properly.

MPS strongly supports evidence-based policies that reduce the risk of firearm-related suicide and domestic violence. By ensuring that firearms are properly surrendered when a protective order is granted, SB 943 will help prevent avoidable tragedies and save lives. We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this bill.

If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact MPS lobbyist, Lisa Harris Jones at lisa.jones@mdlobbyist.com.

Respectfully submitted,
The Maryland Psychiatric Society and the Washington Psychiatric Society
Legislative Action Committee

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