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TESTIMONY ON HB#/0592- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Prohibited Possession of Firearms - Assisted Outpatient Treatment Respondents

TO: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, and members of the Ways & Means Committee

FROM: Richard Keith Kaplowitz

My name is Richard Keith Kaplowitz. I am a resident of District 3, Frederick County. I am submitting this testimony in support of HB#/0592, Prohibited Possession of Firearms - Assisted Outpatient Treatment Respondents

Michigan Medicine at the University of Michigan has studied this issue. They report: ¹

Two issues have surged in awareness across America in recent years: the toll of firearm injuries and deaths, and the impact of mental health conditions.

These two issues intersect in multiple ways – and a growing number of people are directly or indirectly affected by one or both of them.

That’s why it’s important for you to know some key things about the risk of firearm-related incidents involving people with mental health conditions, and take steps to reduce that risk, say three experts from Michigan Medicine, the University of Michigan’s academic medical center, and the Institute for Firearm Injury Prevention who have training and experience in both fields.

If, as multiple elected Republicans maintain, mental health should be the primary focus on prevention of gun violence this bill agrees that people being treated for mental health conditions should not have access to firearms. However, we cannot even point to data on the problem since attempts to permit those studies have been blocked in Congress.

“Guns kill more than 40,000 Americans each year and policymakers must embrace research to understand the problem and prevent gun violence. There is simply no justification for muzzling important CDC research into ways to prevent gun deaths. House Republicans once again put the gun lobby ahead of saving Americans’ lives.” ²

The statistics on gun violence in Maryland show how guns are used in suicides in Maryland: ³

¹ <https://www.michiganmedicine.org/health-lab/firearms-and-mental-health-8-top-facts-know>

² <https://giffords.org/press-release/2023/11/house-gop-just-voted-to-ban-cdc-gun-violence-research/>

³ <https://everystat.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Gun-Violence-in-Maryland-2024-05.pdf>

GUN SUICIDES AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS Every year, an average of 276 people in Maryland die by gun suicides and 24 are wounded by gun suicide attempts—a rate of 4.2 suicides and 0.4 suicide attempts per 100,000 people. Maryland has the 43rd-highest rate of gun suicides and gun suicide attempts in the US.

The Oklahoma Voice reported on mental health and guns in September 2024: ⁴

Firearm suicide is a preventable public health crisis. It is important that we have conversations about mental health, share support resources, and also do everything we can to put time and space between a person in crisis and their access to firearms. Access to a firearm triple someone's risk of death by suicide, and 90% of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal.

Most people who attempt suicide do not die — unless they have access to a gun.

This bill will put Maryland at the forefront of attempting to keep guns from those being treated, even if only as outpatient, undergoing mental health interventions.

This bill will prohibit a person from possessing a regulated firearm, rifle, or shotgun if the person is currently a respondent subject to a court order to comply with certain assisted outpatient treatment. It will further require a court to promptly report certain information through a certain data portal if the court orders a person to comply with certain assisted outpatient treatment.

We can save lives with this bill by limiting firearm access to persons whose treatment for a mental health issue increases the risk of misuse of a firearm.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB#/0592.

⁴ <https://oklahomavoice.com/2024/09/20/guns-raise-risk-of-suicide-death-this-national-suicide-prevention-month-lets-focus-on-safety/>