

MARYLAND PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY



January 28, 2025

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The Honorable Luke Clippinger
Chair, Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Support – HB 934: Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention - Resources, Tools, and Educational Materials

Dear Chairman Clippinger 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 MPS/WPS would like to express strong support for House Bill 934, which expands the role of the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention to include the creation of educational materials, public awareness campaigns, and resources related to firearm safety, suicide prevention, and Extreme Risk Protective Orders (ERPOs).

Suicide is the leading cause of firearm deaths, accounting for more than half of all gun-related fatalities nationwide. Research has consistently demonstrated that access to firearms is a major risk factor for suicide. Studies show that individuals with a firearm in the home are three times more likely to die by suicide than those without, and firearm suicide attempts are almost always fatal. Maryland, like much of the country, continues to see a rising suicide rate, and firearm access remains one of the most modifiable risk factors.

House Bill 934 represents a crucial step in reducing these preventable deaths by prioritizing public education and access to life-saving information. The inclusion of firearm safety resources, suicide prevention strategies, and training on ERPOs will empower communities, health professionals, and law enforcement to take proactive measures. Education has been shown to be one of the most effective tools in reducing suicide and firearm-related harm. When individuals and families are aware of the risks, safe storage options, and legal tools available to prevent crisis-driven gun deaths, lives can be saved.

ERPOs, in particular, have proven to be a valuable intervention. Maryland was the first state to allow clinicians to petition for ERPOs, and research shows that these laws reduce firearm suicides. A study on Connecticut's risk-warrant law found that for every 10 to 22 firearms removed through ERPOs, at least one suicide was prevented. Yet, awareness of this life-saving tool remains low, and many at-risk individuals and families do not know how to utilize it. HB 934 will help bridge this gap by ensuring that the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention actively promotes education on ERPOs and safe firearm storage.

By supporting HB 934, Maryland will take a meaningful step toward preventing firearm suicides through evidence-based, public health-driven strategies. I urge the committee to issue a favorable report on this critical legislation. If you have any questions regarding this testimony, please contact Lisa Harris Jones at lisa.jones@mdlobbyist.com.

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