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Testimony of Josh Scharff, General Counsel and Senior Director of Programs,
Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence
Support for SB 0692
Before the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
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Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

Founded in 1974, Brady works across Congress, courts, and communities, uniting gun owners and non-gun owners alike, to take action, not sides, and end America's gun violence epidemic. Brady today carries the name of Jim Brady, who was shot and severely injured in the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan. Jim and his wife, Sarah led the fight to pass federal legislation requiring background checks for gun sales. Brady continues to uphold Jim and Sarah's legacy by uniting Americans from coast to coast, red and blue, young and old, liberal and conservative, to combat the epidemic of gun violence. **In furtherance of our goal to reduce firearm violence across Maryland, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence is proud to support the passage of SB 692.**

Gun violence is a real, but preventable, threat to Marylanders. In 2024 alone, there were 671 firearm deaths in the state.¹ And deaths do not tell the whole story. That same year, there were 780 Emergency Room visits for non-fatal firearm injuries.² While no Marylanders are immune to gun violence, Black boys and men bear a particular burden. Despite only being 14% of Maryland's total population, Black boys and men accounted for half of Maryland's gun deaths.³ Similarly, non-Hispanic white men are only 24% of Maryland's population but account for 64% of gun suicides. Yet, research shows that all forms of gun violence, suicide included, are preventable, and effectively regulating the gun industry is a key aspect of prevention.

Although Maryland has made great strides in regulating the gun industry, the state neither requires gun dealer employees to undergo any training nor requires gun dealers to undergo ongoing training. Given firearms' inherently deadly nature, this lack of training is especially egregious when compared to how

¹ https://health.maryland.gov/violence-prevention/Documents/CFVPI_FirearmViolenceDataInMD_0625.pdf

² Id.

³ Id.

Maryland regulates other industries. It is standard practice across many regulated industries in Maryland to require licensees and practitioners to undergo rigorous multi-hour training and testing on the state and national level, for less inherently dangerous activities than selling firearms. For example, employees and registered business agents of cannabis vendors, alcohol vendors, pharmacy technicians, and cosmetologists in Maryland must undergo training on responsible business practices, similar to what is proposed in this bill.

SB 692 fills an important gap in Maryland’s gun safety infrastructure by requiring training.

Gun dealers play a critical gatekeeping role: their conduct has a direct bearing on whether guns are diverted to the illegal market or made available to individuals who are at risk of harming themselves or others. Despite these substantial risks and the fact that gun dealers can play a critical role in preventing violence in our communities, they are not sufficiently regulated at the state or federal level. Namely, no federal laws or regulations require gun dealers to train their employees on recognizing signs of illegal activity. Likewise, Maryland’s current state licensing system only requires the dealer, not employees, to receive initial in-person orientation training. This is a massive loophole, as employees are often responsible for handling and selling firearms on a daily basis. Furthermore, current Maryland law does not require ongoing standardized training for anyone: dealers or employees. Ongoing and updated training is incredibly important because state and local laws and regulations change often, as do the tactics of straw purchasers, gun traffickers, and thieves. This legislation is critical to curbing dangerous sales, preventing guns from being diverted into the criminal market, and reducing the likelihood of straw purchases, theft, burglary, and loss of inventory.

This bill, therefore, requires dealers and employees who sell or handle firearms to undergo training on responsible firearm business practices that Maryland law already requires them to uphold. The training includes, but is not limited to, a review and update of state and federal laws with guidance on how to comply, how to identify straw purchasers, as well as how to identify buyers who are a danger to themselves or others. Standardized and regular training on gun laws is an incredible tool for dealers and their employees to ensure they are engaging in safe and legal business practices and to prevent straw purchasing, gun trafficking, and theft of firearms and ammunition, reducing gun violence. As the ATF asserts gun dealers “can significantly reduce the risk of straw purchasing at their store [by]... educating employees to recognize and respond to red flags indicating a possible straw purchase.”⁴

Maryland’s firearm dealers and employees can and do play a role in gun violence. SB 692’s training requirement can help them keep Marylanders alive.

Training, like that proposed in SB 692, matters. Consider, for example, the difference between Maryland and New York. Both states have robust gun laws, including industry accountability and state-level licensing. But New York requires dealers and employees to undergo initial and ongoing training; Maryland does not. In 2024, 48% of crime guns recovered in Maryland and traced to purchasers were sold by Maryland dealers. In New York, however, only 21% of crime guns recovered and traced to a purchaser

⁴ Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. (2024, December 20). *Don't Lie for the Other Guy*. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved August 6, 2025, from <https://www.atf.gov/firearms/dont-lie-other-guy>

came from in-state. It is reasonable to conclude that training could account for at least some of the differences between Maryland and New York's in-state crime guns.⁵

Statistics show that Maryland would be wise to resist complacency. Maryland dealers supplied 4,529 guns used in crimes in 2024.⁶ From 2020 to 2024, the number of crime guns traced to Maryland dealers grew every year, with an overall increase of 23%. Between 2023 and 2024 alone, the number rose 8.6%, even as nationally the number of crime guns traced to dealers decreased. In other words, Maryland's dealers and their employees are still allowing too many dangerous sales to occur; training, as required by SB 692, could help reduce this trend.

SB 692 benefits dealers because it equips them to comply with their preexisting obligation to engage in safe business practices

Current Maryland law, Md. Code Ann., Cts. & Jud. Proc. § 3-2502(A), enables the Attorney General or localities to seek civil liability for a firearm industry member whose business practices lead to harm. In particular, Maryland law already requires gun industry members to implement "Reasonable controls" [which] "means policies that are designed" to prevent the sale of firearms to individuals who would use them for harm. § 3-250. Moreover, if a firearm industry actor's failure to implement reasonable controls leads to harm, current Maryland law allows them to be held liable. Therefore, requiring gun dealers and their employees to undergo training on safe business practices does not create liability; potential liability already exists, as it does for every other industry. Indeed, Maryland's Attorney General, along with D.C. and Everytown Law, is engaged in active litigation against a Maryland gun dealer for facilitating straw sales.⁷ If anything, then a training requirement helps firearm industry members avoid liability by equipping them to successfully comply with the preexisting requirement to implement reasonable controls.

This is not a new concept. Drivers' training alone does not create liability; traffic laws do. But drivers' training equips drivers to comply with their preexisting obligations to obey traffic laws. Maintenance training alone does not create liability for airplane mechanics; the law and the FAA do. But maintenance training equips airplane mechanics to comply with their preexisting obligations to obey all laws and regulations. Cosmetology training alone does not create liability for hair stylists; public health and sanitation laws do. But cosmetology training equips hairstylists to comply with their preexisting obligation to obey all relevant laws and regulations.

SB 692 will save the state money by reducing the costs associated with responding to gun violence

The modest cost of creating and maintaining the training required by SB 692 pales in comparison to the massive costs imposed by gun violence. According to Johns Hopkins University, gun violence costs Maryland \$9.1 billion each year;⁸ taxpayers pay a significant portion of these costs.⁹ Therefore, investing in prevention, like SB 692, not only saves priceless human lives but also millions of taxpayer dollars. As

⁵ [Number of Firearms Sourced and Recovered in the United States, 2024 \(ATF\)](#)

⁶ *ID*

⁷ [District of Columbia and Maryland Sue Three Local Gun Stores for Facilitating Illegal Gun Trafficking](#) (currently on appeal)

⁸ [Maryland Gun Violence Data](#), Johns Hopkins Center For Gun Violence Solutions

⁹ [Governor Moore Proclaims National Gun Violence Awareness Day in Maryland](#)

Benjamin Franklin said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” In this case, a small investment in training firearm dealers and their employees to prevent dangerous business practices will save Maryland and its taxpayers heartache and millions of dollars.

Conclusion

Gun dealers and their employees are a bulwark against gun violence. Right now, Maryland has decent oversight and regulations on firearm sales, but serious gaps remain. One of the most consequential gaps is the lack of any training for gun dealer employees and the lack of ongoing training for gun dealers. SB 692, in requiring gun dealers and employees to undergo ongoing training, will not only help gun dealers comply with their existing duty to engage in safe business practices but also save lives.

For these reasons, Brady urges a favorable report on SB 692.

Sincerely,

Josh Scharff
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The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence