

TO: The Honorable **Chair** Smith, **Vice Chair** Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Spencer Cantrell, JD
Assistant Scientist, Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions

DATE: January 16, 2026

RE: SB 20 Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act

My name is Spencer Cantrell, and I am an Assistant Scientist at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions. **This testimony represents my strong support of SB 20 Family and Law Enforcement Protection Act- a critical bill that will improve the court’s ability to ensure protection for victims and survivors of domestic violence by strengthening firearm surrender provisions in protective order cases.**

Prior to joining the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, I spent most of my professional career working in support of victims and survivors of domestic violence. Firearms were a common challenge in my work with clients as an attorney and victim advocate. Clients were too often threatened by their abuser with a firearm. The known presence of a firearm in the home or an abuser’s access to a firearm often shaped my client’s safety planning, from thinking of leaving their abuser and for years on, as some victims/ survivors would continue to co-parent with their abusers for years to come. Some clients who I have not seen in years are people I think of frequently: a client whose abuser was in law enforcement, and so when she called the authorities, they dismissed her concerns and would not take a report. I remember another client who was impoverished and too afraid to file for child support because her abuser, the father of her child, had threatened to kill her and her children with a firearm if she ever took him to court for any reason. I’ll never forget safety planning with my client, who was nine months pregnant, about what she would do if the abuser showed up to the maternity ward with a firearm. The challenges and fears of an abuser with firearms were an unfortunate common throughline in this work.

The research on the impact of firearms in domestic violence is consistent with what I saw in my work with individual victims and survivors and overwhelmingly shows the importance of consistently removing firearms from domestic violence abusers. Research shows that nearly half

1. Tobin-Tyler E. Intimate Partner Violence, Firearm Injuries and Homicides: A Health Justice Approach to Two Intersecting Public Health Crises. *J Law Med Ethics*. 51(1):64-76. doi:10.1017/jme.2023.41
2. 2022-2023 Domestic Violence Fatality Review State Implementation Team (DVFRSIT) Report. <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>
3. Zeoli AM, McCourt A, Buggs S, Frattaroli S, Lilley D, Webster DW. Analysis of the Strength of Legal Firearms Restrictions for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Their Associations With Intimate Partner Homicide. *Am J Epidemiol*. 2018;187(11):2365-2371. doi:10.1093/aje/kwy174
4. The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014–2019 | *Injury Epidemiology* | <https://injejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330>
5. Improving the Response to Firearms in Civil-Protection Order Cases. <https://bwjip.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-the-Response-to-Firearms-in-Civil-Protection-Order-Cases.pdf>
6. Removing Guns From Batterers. doi:10.1177/1077801213490561
7. Can Justice System Interventions Prevent Intimate Partner Homicide? An Analysis of Rates of Help Seeking Prior to Fatality. doi:10.1177/0886260519851179

of all female homicide victims in the U.S. are killed by current or former intimate partners.¹ In 2022, 56 Marylanders—ranging in age from 1 to 67 years old—lost their lives in domestic violence-related incidents.² Of these fatalities, 75% of all domestic violence homicides involved a firearm.² Domestic violence affects more than the victims of abusive relationships; many of Maryland’s domestic violence deaths were bystanders killed in shootings, and 30 children were left behind by victims of domestic violence in 2022.³ Domestic violence has ripple effects on entire communities. We also know that most mass shooters have a history of committing domestic violence.⁴

The problem is more than clear. However, there are concrete, definitive steps that we can take to make victims of domestic violence and our entire communities much safer. Domestic violence protective orders that require firearm removal are associated with a 12% reduction in intimate partner homicide and a 16% reduction in firearm intimate partner homicide.³ When domestic violence protective orders firearm restrictions cover ex parte orders, not just final protective orders, there is a 13% reduction in intimate partner homicide and a 16% reduction in firearm intimate partner homicide.⁴ Firearm removal is widely supported by domestic violence experts, advocates, law enforcement, and the public, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, which made the official recommendation to mandate the removal of firearms when serving a DVPO.⁶

Under current law, gaps in enforcement mechanisms create dangerous loopholes that allow abusers to maintain access to firearms even after a protective order is issued. SB 20 closes these gaps by:

- **Mandating the surrender of firearms** for respondents subject to both temporary and final protective orders, ensuring immediate risk reduction.⁵
- **Providing clear protocols** for judges and prosecutors to track compliance, issue contempt orders, and take action against respondents who have not surrendered their firearms.⁵
- **Enhancing inter-agency coordination**, ensuring law enforcement, judicial officials, and victim service providers effectively communicate and share critical information.⁵

Removing firearms from domestic violence incidents is not just a precaution—it is a proven, life-saving intervention. This bill ensures that Maryland is doing everything possible to prevent tragedies before they occur.

By requiring courts to obtain and act on firearm access information, SB 20 proactively reduces the risk of domestic violence incidents involving guns.⁷ This measure helps prevent homicides,

1. Tobin-Tyler E. Intimate Partner Violence, Firearm Injuries and Homicides: A Health Justice Approach to Two Intersecting Public Health Crises. *J Law Med Ethics*. 51(1):64-76. doi:10.1017/jme.2023.41

2. 2022-2023 Domestic Violence Fatality Review State Implementation Team (DVFRSIT) Report. <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>

3. Zeoli AM, McCourt A, Buggs S, Frattaroli S, Lilley D, Webster DW. Analysis of the Strength of Legal Firearms Restrictions for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Their Associations With Intimate Partner Homicide. *Am J Epidemiol*. 2018;187(11):2365-2371. doi:10.1093/aje/kwy174

4. The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014–2019 | *Injury Epidemiology* | <https://injejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330>

5. Improving the Response to Firearms in Civil-Protection Order Cases. <https://bwjip.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-the-Response-to-Firearms-in-Civil-Protection-Order-Cases.pdf>

6. Removing Guns From Batterers. doi:10.1177/1077801213490561

7. Can Justice System Interventions Prevent Intimate Partner Homicide? An Analysis of Rates of Help Seeking Prior to Fatality. doi:10.1177/0886260519851179

injuries, and escalating violence, ultimately saving lives. Consistently documenting firearm possession creates a clear legal pathway for removing guns from individuals who pose a threat, closing dangerous enforcement gaps that might otherwise allow abusers to retain access to deadly weapons.

Accordingly, I respectfully request a **FAVORABLE** committee report on **SB 20**.

1. Tobin-Tyler E. Intimate Partner Violence, Firearm Injuries and Homicides: A Health Justice Approach to Two Intersecting Public Health Crises. *J Law Med Ethics*. 51(1):64-76. doi:10.1017/jme.2023.41
2. 2022-2023 Domestic Violence Fatality Review State Implementation Team (DVFRSIT) Report. <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>
3. Zeoli AM, McCourt A, Buggs S, Frattaroli S, Lilley D, Webster DW. Analysis of the Strength of Legal Firearms Restrictions for Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and Their Associations With Intimate Partner Homicide. *Am J Epidemiol*. 2018;187(11):2365-2371. doi:10.1093/aje/kwy174
4. The role of domestic violence in fatal mass shootings in the United States, 2014–2019 | *Injury Epidemiology* | <https://injejournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s40621-021-00330>
5. Improving the Response to Firearms in Civil-Protection Order Cases. <https://bwjip.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-the-Response-to-Firearms-in-Civil-Protection-Order-Cases.pdf>
6. Removing Guns From Batterers. doi:10.1177/1077801213490561
7. Can Justice System Interventions Prevent Intimate Partner Homicide? An Analysis of Rates of Help Seeking Prior to Fatality. doi:10.1177/0886260519851179