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400 N. Capitol Street NW, Suite 475, Washington, D.C. 20001

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The Honorable Sandy Bartlett  
Chair, House Judiciary Committee  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: House Bill 577 – Criminal Law – Firearm Crimes – Machine Gun Convertible Pistols

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Chris Kopacki, and I serve as Director of Government Relations for the Mid-Atlantic region for the National Shooting Sports Foundation (“NSSF”), the trade association for the firearm, ammunition, and hunting industry. On behalf of NSSF and its members, I respectfully request an unfavorable report on House Bill 577.

NSSF strongly opposes HB 577 because it is unnecessary, overbroad, and unlikely to improve public safety. The conduct this bill seeks to address—the manufacture, possession, or use of devices that convert a semiautomatic firearm into a machine gun—is already prohibited under both federal law and Maryland law, with severe criminal penalties. Auto-sears, switches, and similar conversion devices are defined as machine guns themselves under federal law, regardless of whether they are installed, and are already illegal to possess, manufacture, or transfer.

Rather than focusing on criminal misuse or illegal trafficking of these devices, HB 577 takes a fundamentally different and flawed approach by banning firearms based on their theoretical ability to be modified with an already-illegal device. As other stakeholders have noted, virtually any semiautomatic pistol could, in theory, be altered using an illegal auto-sear. Regulating firearms based on hypothetical vulnerability rather than actual criminal conduct risks sweeping in a broad category of common, lawfully owned handguns without meaningfully deterring criminal behavior.

HB 577 also introduces a highly technical and subjective definition of a “machine gun convertible pistol,” relying on concepts such as whether a firearm can be “readily converted” using “common household tools.” These terms lack clear, objective standards

and invite inconsistent enforcement. Law-abiding firearm owners, federally licensed dealers, manufacturers, and gunsmiths could face criminal exposure based on design characteristics that have long been lawful and federally approved.

Additionally, the bill grants the Department of State Police broad authority to publish and modify a list of prohibited firearms through regulation, without clear statutory criteria or meaningful legislative oversight. This approach raises due process concerns and creates significant uncertainty for businesses and consumers attempting to comply with the law. Firearms that are lawful today could be rendered contraband through administrative action rather than legislative process.

HB 577 may also have unintended consequences for law enforcement and public agencies. Many of the firearms potentially implicated by this bill are standard-issue sidearms widely used by law enforcement agencies nationwide. Although exemptions exist, the breadth and ambiguity of the bill's language raise questions regarding procurement, servicing, and long-term availability of commonly used duty firearms.

Most importantly, HB 577 does not address the actual source of criminal firearm conversions. Auto-sears and similar devices are overwhelmingly smuggled or unlawfully manufactured, often through illegal importation or 3D printing, and are already prohibited. Individuals who possess or use these devices are already committing serious felonies. This bill does not meaningfully increase deterrence for those actors, but instead shifts focus toward lawful commerce and lawful ownership.

NSSF supports efforts that prioritize enforcement of existing laws, prosecution of violent offenders, and disruption of illegal trafficking networks. HB 577, however, duplicates existing prohibitions, expands criminal liability through vague and speculative standards, and risks unintended consequences for law-abiding Marylanders and lawful businesses without a demonstrated public-safety benefit.

For these reasons, NSSF respectfully urges the Committee to issue an unfavorable report on House Bill 577.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Kopacki  
Director of Government Relations, Mid-Atlantic  
National Shooting Sports Foundation