

**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
ON FEBRUARY 25, 2026
BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
ON HB 1339, HANDGUN ROSTER REFORM

FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Honorable Chair Bartlett, Vice-Chair Davis, and Members of the Committee:

The Critical Issues Forum: Advocacy for Social Justice (CIF) provides this testimony in support of HB 1339, which will improve the procedures for manufacturers to obtain approval to offer handguns for sale in the state of Maryland, making unsafe and particularly dangerous firearms less available.

Comprised of Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, CIF is a coalition of synagogues with over 1,750 families. CIF is a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues that relate to our shared values, including the Jewish tradition's emphasis on the primary value of human life and, consequently, on protecting our fellow citizens from gun violence.

Nearly 47,000 people died of gun-related injuries in the United States in 2023, and handguns were used in 53% of murders that year, according to the latest available statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.¹ And Maryland citizens are not immune from this handgun violence. Just recently, on February 9, a 16-year-old student was arrested following a shooting inside Thomas S. Wooten High School in Rockville,

¹ *What the Data Says about Gun Deaths in the U.S.*, Pew Research Center, March 15, 2025

MD, just a few miles from Temple Beth Ami, leaving another student hospitalized.²

A critical component of limiting deaths and injuries from gun violence is preventing the sale of unsafe and particularly dangerous firearms. To this end, Title 5 of the Maryland Public Safety Code created a Handgun Roster Board (HRB), an entity in the Department of the State Police, comprised of 11 members selected from a variety of agencies, interest groups, and the general public.³ The HRB maintains a roster of authorized handguns, which can be sold in the state.⁴ Any person who desires to add a handgun to that roster must submit a petition HRB. The current law requires that the HRB, in evaluating a petition, must consider nine characteristics of the handgun, including: certain physical aspects of the firearm; its operation; its concealability; and its “utility for legitimate sporting activity, self-protection, or law enforcement.”⁵ The only guidance as to the applicability of these factors is that the HRB shall not “place undue weight on any one characteristic.”⁶

This system has not worked to prevent the sale of dangerous firearms in the state. By way of example, the HRB has approved so-called pistols that should be barred as illegal short barreled rifles. Specifically, the HRB has repeatedly approved semi-automatic “pistols” with stabilizing braces. It has done so in the face of evidence demonstrating that these firearms are generally fired from the shoulder, and are thus short barreled rifles banned under Maryland law.

And the HRB has routinely allowed unsafe firearms to remain on the roster. For example, it has made no effort to assess whether the Sig Sauer P320 should be removed from the roster, despite the filing of numerous lawsuits alleging that this pistol can fire without the trigger being pulled.

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2026/02/11/wootton-school-shooting-maryland/>

³ MD Pub Safety Code §5-404.

⁴ *Id.* §5-405(a)(1)

⁵ *Id.* §5-405(b).

⁶ *Id.*

In short, the HRB is not equipped to make the legal and factual determinations necessary to carry out the law and protect Maryland citizens from these dangerous weapons.

In recognition of these deficiencies, HB 1339 transfers the authority to place handguns on the roster from the HRB to the Attorney General.⁷ HB 1339 further requires that the AG “conduct a legal review of each petition” and “determine whether the handgun is lawful under State and federal law for placement on the handgun roster.”⁸ The requirement of a specific finding of legality by Attorney General, the state official most directly responsible for assessing and applying the code, is both a simpler and more direct way to enforce the statutory requirements for firearm sales. The current statute does not require the HRB to conduct such an analysis. The HRB must only consider, as noted above, nine “characteristics,” none of which call for a legal analysis.⁹

HB 1339 also contains extensive requirements for safety testing. This is a necessary and welcome addition.

There are, however, aspects of HB 1339 that require clarification. CIF requests the following amendments.

HB 1339 retains the nine “characteristics” previously assigned to the HRB for the Attorney General to consider, repeating the instruction that any one factor not receive “undue weight.”¹⁰ However, it is apparent that many of these factors should have dispositive weight – no firearm that fails the “reliability as to safety” or “utility for legitimate” activity should be approved. If this standard is to be retained, it should be amended to require that all of these characteristics be satisfied.

HB 1339 also states that a petitioner “has the burden of proving to the Attorney General that the handgun should be placed on the handgun roster.”¹¹ The provision listing the information that a petitioner must

⁷ Compare HB 1339 §5-403(A)(1) (“The Attorney General shall approve the placement of a handgun on the handgun roster”) to §5-405(c)(1) (“The Board may not . . . place a handgun on the handgun roster on its own initiative.”).

⁸ HB 1339 §5-403(B).

⁹ MD Pub Safety Code §5-405(b).

¹⁰ HB 1339 §5-403(E).

¹¹ *Id.* §5-403(A)(3).

provide,¹² does not, however, require the submission of evidence related to this burden. If the burden is real, the petitioner should be required to make such a showing.

HB 1339 also requires that the petitioner submit “any manufacturer representations.”¹³ Because manufacturers many read this requirement narrowly, the Committee should clarify that this provision would require the petitioner to submit all its promotional material related to the handgun, including advertising and web pages.

Finally, the current law allows a third party to object to an HRB decision to add a handgun to the roster.¹⁴ HB 1339 does not contain a similar provision that would allow a member of the public to object to an Attorney General’s decision to place a handgun on the roster. Because the substantive authority to carry out the statute will now lie with the Attorney General, HB 1339 should be amended to allow the public or a party to contest a decision to list a handgun on the roster, first through a request to reconsider to the Attorney General, and, if not successful, in court.

HB 1339 is an important effort to improve an important element of Maryland’s generally robust regulation of these very dangerous weapons, and we commend the Committee for taking up this challenge.

For these reasons, the Critical Issues Forum recommends a favorable report on HB 1339, with amendments.

¹² HB 1339 §5-403(D)(1).

¹³ *Id.* §5-403(D)(1)(III).

¹⁴ *Id.* §5-404(d)(1)(ii) (requiring that the Board provide “notice that any objection to the handgun’s inclusion on the handgun roster shall be filed with the Board within 30 days”).