

Paul S. Nestadt, M.D.  
The James Wah Professor of  
Psychiatry & Behavioral Science  
Associate Professor  
Department of Psychiatry  
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

Meyer 1<sup>st</sup> floor, Room 114  
600 N. Wolfe Street  
Baltimore, MD 21287-0005  
410-955-8003 Office  
410-614-7858 Coordinator  
pnestadt@jhmi.edu



Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am a psychiatrist and Associate Professor at Johns Hopkins, where I am Medical Director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Suicide Prevention. I also chair the Maryland Suicide Fatality Review Committee. I am not writing today on behalf of these state affiliated organizations or Hopkins, but as an individual expert, whose clinical and research work focuses on suicide prevention and the impact of firearm policy, access, and information on suicide risk, particularly at the state level. I live, work and practice in Maryland. I am not testifying on behalf of Johns Hopkins University or any affiliated institution, and the views expressed here are solely my own. **I urge the committee to support House bill 223 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.**

This bill reflects a public health approach to firearm violence prevention that is evidence informed, collaborative, and responsive to the needs of communities disproportionately impacted by firearm injury and death. In my work, I consistently see that access to accurate, practical, and trusted information is a critical component of effective prevention. The bill appropriately empowers the Center to consult with state and local agencies, public health experts, and community partners to ensure that educational efforts are credible, coordinated, and relevant. From a suicide prevention perspective, the provisions explicitly naming secure firearm storage, Extreme Risk Protective Orders, and the 988 Crisis Lifeline are particularly important. Firearms are the most lethal method of suicide, and brief periods of crisis often determine outcomes. Policies that support education around safe storage and temporary separation from firearms during periods of elevated risk save lives without infringing on lawful ownership. Similarly, increasing public awareness of ERPOs and crisis response resources helps families, clinicians, and communities act earlier and more effectively when someone is at risk. The bill does not mandate behavior; rather, it strengthens the state's capacity to share evidence-based information and support informed decision-making.

House Bill 223 builds on Maryland's existing commitment to addressing firearm violence through a coordinated, data-driven, and prevention-focused framework. By formally authorizing the development of educational materials and public awareness efforts, the bill closes an important gap between policy, practice, and public understanding. I would encourage the Judiciary Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 223. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued leadership on issues of public safety and public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul S. Nestadt", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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