

**Testimony on House Bill 197 – Favorable**

**Presbyterians for Police Transformation and  
the Social Witness and Action Committee  
of the  
Takoma Park Presbyterian Church**

**Regarding HB 197 – Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act**

**Submitted to the  
Maryland House Ways and Means Committee**

**March 5, 2026**

Dear Honorable Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

Presbyterians for Police Transformation, a police reform and racial justice organization sponsored by the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church, together with the congregation's Social Witness and Action Committee, welcome the opportunity to present this joint written statement in strong support of the Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act of 2026. We urge you to report the bill out of committee favorably as soon as possible and to work with your colleagues to adopt the measure into law during the current session of the General Assembly.

Gun violence is the leading cause of death for children and teens in Maryland, a fact though oft repeated should nevertheless shock the conscience. Moreover, gun violence costs Marylanders over \$10 billion a year, including nearly \$400 million born by taxpayers according to Everytown for Gun Safety.

Investment in prevention, intervention, and survivor support is essential to reduce this appalling loss of life and costly burden. Such an investment needs a steady and secure source of funding, especially considering the recent shortsighted reductions in federal support for community violence intervention and trauma care.

That is precisely what this bill would provide -- ongoing dedicated support for prevention, intervention, and care. The bill would place an 11 percent excise tax on the gross receipts of firearm dealers derived from the sales of firearms in Maryland, matching the longstanding 11 percent federal excise tax. The new state excise tax would apply to retail sales made on or after July 1, 2027, for large retailers and a year later for any other federally licensed firearms dealer. These funds, estimated at approximately \$50 million annually, would be distributed as follows:

- 26 percent each to the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention & Intervention and the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program to reduce firearm-related harm and provide violence interrupters to impacted communities;
- 20 percent each to the Coordinated Community Supports Partnership Fund and the Survivors of Homicide Victims Grant Program to address students' behavioral health needs and provide victim assistance, advocacy, and support; and

- Four percent each to the Maryland Trauma Physicians Services Fund and the Cowley Shock Trauma Center to support trauma care for victims of gunshot injuries, regardless of their ability to pay.

As a congregation, we are deeply committed to actions that reduce racial trauma and improve racial equity. According to the Racial Equity Impact Note for this legislation:

*“Investments in gun violence prevention and support services may help to reduce racial disparities in health and safety outcomes if the funds are directed to communities that have historically experienced higher rates of firearm-related violence and trauma. Black Marylanders are overwhelmingly affected by gun violence as compared to other demographic groups.... between 2022 and 2024... Black individuals accounted for 61% of fatal injuries and 70% of nonfatal injuries.” (page 3)*

Moreover, dedicated revenue from this proposed tax would:

*“...support programs that aim to reduce inequities through gun violence prevention and related services. This would positively affect all communities, but particularly Black communities that are disproportionately victimized by gun violence.” (page 4)*

Redirecting a portion of firearm-related profits to address the public health and financial burdens of gun violence while improving community safety for all Marylanders, and particularly for communities and individuals of color, is in our view a very worthwhile bargain.

We applaud Delegate Mireku-North and Senator Benson for introducing this critically important legislation. Our thanks also to all the bill’s co-sponsors, including, from the Ways and Means Committee, Vice Chair Feldmark and Delegates Palakovich Carr and Young.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this vital legislation. We encourage your strong support and urge you to act with courage to help advance this legislation into law during this current term.

*Submitted by Rev. Mark Harper ([markharper@takomaparkpc.org](mailto:markharper@takomaparkpc.org)), Pastor, Ferd Hoefner ([fhoefner@gmail.com](mailto:fhoefner@gmail.com)) on behalf of Presbyterians for Police Transformation, and Carolyn Seaman ([cseamangm@gmail.com](mailto:cseamangm@gmail.com)) on behalf of the Social Witness and Action Committee, Takoma Park Presbyterian Church, 310 Tulip Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912*