



Volunteer Testimony

**SB 816-Support
Firearm Dealers' Safety Act
Nick Wilson
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 20, 2020**

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of The Committee:

My name is Nick Wilson and I live in Baltimore City. I have been a criminal justice researcher with an emphasis in gun violence policies for more than 10 years. I am here to urge you to support SB 816, better known as the Firearms Dealers' Safety Act.

The number of firearms stolen from gun stores each year is on the rise. Between 2012 and 2016, the ATF found that burglaries of Federal Firearm Licenses (FFLs) rose by 48% and FFL robberies increased by 175%.

Even if we strengthen our background check and licensing systems until it's impossible for a person prohibited from possessing a firearm to purchase a gun, there will be a steady supply of crime guns if a couple of guys with nothing but saws and bolt cutters from a local hardware store can steal 200 firearms from one gun store. This is exactly what happened in North Carolina. Within three years, 68 of the 200 guns were recovered at crime scenes in five states, including multiple robberies, two homicides and a sexual assault. After one of the burglars was caught, he said of stealing guns from a gun store: "It's like taking candy from a baby."

Maryland gun stores are not immune from this growing national trend. Baltimore County experienced 10 burglaries or attempted burglaries in 2018 and 2019, and 45 firearms were stolen after burglars drove a Subaru Outback through the wall of gun stores in Howard Montgomery County. If we are going to keep Maryland communities safe, we must ensure all gun dealers meet a baseline level of security and send a message to gun traffickers that we are not a state to be messed with.

I am sympathetic to the considerable responsibility, and sometimes outside pressure, placed upon each one of you by the introduction of any firearms legislation. As a researcher focused on evaluating the effectiveness of gun violence prevention policies, one of my primary tasks is to understand and find common ground between diverse stakeholders. This usually includes gun owners, law enforcement, survivors, licensed firearms dealers, and

community members tired of the daily gun violence. As you're likely well aware, this is not always an easy task in today's political climate.

Fortunately, the Firearms Dealers' Safety Act will not require you to carefully weigh in the balance community safety and the Second Amendment. The requirements listed in SB 816 are already considered best practices and used by many licensed dealers in Maryland around the U.S. They also mirror the recommendations of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) because weak security measures threaten the safety of gun store employees, law enforcement, and crime victims.

ATF is the federal law enforcement agency with the authority to inspect gun dealers, manufacturers, and importers. "It's clear from the crime guns we recover every day that firearms stolen from FFL retailers are a serious threat to public safety," said then-ATF head Thomas Brandon. Despite ATF leadership recognizing the threat posed by lax gun dealer security, the underfunded and understaffed agency was able to inspect fewer than 8% of all FFLs in 2018. Furthermore, federal law does not require specific security measures for gun stores. We cannot afford to wait until the federal government acts - we must give Maryland State Police the information and tools they need to provide oversight and accountability.

In a IACP report about reducing gun violence, police chiefs across the country recommended state-level regulations that include "requiring background checks on all gun dealer employees, enhancing record keeping regarding gun sales within their jurisdictions, or heightening other security measures, including requiring that FFLs secure their inventory."

NSSF, the firearms industry trade association, also recognizes the need to improve security to protect public safety. "As an FFL you have a professional obligation to ensure your firearms don't make it into the hands of criminals. Far too many FFL burglaries that occur could have been prevented by improved safeguards." NSSF's Operation Secure Store assessment program is designed to help firearm retailers and gun ranges to strengthen security procedures and combat theft.

In sum, I urge you to support SB 816 because the Firearms Dealers' Safety Act is one of the rare firearm policies where there is broad consensus that reasonable common sense measures must be taken to save lives.