

Written Testimony of Danielle Veith In SUPPORT of SB 958

TO: Chair Will Smith, Vice-Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Danielle Veith, Takoma Park, MD (District 20)

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Just over a month ago, volunteers and supporters with Maryland Moms Demand Action from nearly every legislative district across the state—more than 400 strong—gathered in Annapolis and met with every single state legislator (or their staff) demanding that our elected representatives do more to prevent gun violence in our communities. Since then, we have returned dozens of times to advocate for common sense changes to our gun laws. Thousands more mothers and others—who can't take time away from work or family to demand that more be done to address the epidemic of gun violence in our country and our state—stand behind every one of us who shows up in the capital.

As members of this committee, I know you're all too aware of the gun violence crisis we have here in Maryland—not only in Baltimore, but across our state—and across our country. Ghost guns may not seem to be a big part of that crisis right now, but it's a problem that's growing at an alarming rate, and it's a problem that's going to make the crisis even worse if we don't do something about it now. In the few short years that we have been pushing for this legislation in Maryland, untraceable, undetectable firearms have gone from a mostly theoretical threat to an exponentially more dangerous problem. Ghost guns have been used in mass shootings, in attacks on law enforcement, and have been seized in criminal investigations.

In neighboring DC, law enforcement officials have seen an exponential increase in ghost guns recently. In 2017, they recovered only three ghost guns from crime scenes. By 2018, it was up to 25, and last year, they found 115 ghost guns in DC.¹ Already in California, 30 percent of all guns now recovered are un-serialized ghost guns.² Right now, illegal gun traffickers, along with terrorists, convicted felons and others who couldn't pass a background check, can legally purchase unfinished receivers and other parts and kits which can easily be turned into guns with no questions asked. By putting in place reasonable regulations prohibiting the purchase, possession, sale and manufacture of undetectable, disguised, untraceable, or un-serialized firearms, also known as ghost guns, this bill not only makes sure that our laws are keeping up with rapid changes in technology, it ensures that prohibited people can't easily circumvent the strong gun laws our state has already passed.

Six states have already passed ghost gun laws to regulate 3D printed or DIY firearms, including—undetectable weapons that can be carried through metal detectors or disassembled to evade detection by x-ray machines, disguised guns, such as those built to look like pens, keychains or cell phones, so they can be more easily concealed, and un-serialized firearms, sold without a background check and which cannot be traced by law enforcement. Maryland should be next to join New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, California, New York, and Washington state.

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<https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/blog/21109272/dc-recovered-115-ghost-guns-in-2019-up-from-25-the-year-before>

² <https://www.thetrace.org/2019/05/ghost-gun-california-crime>

Without SB958, anyone with the right tools can easily access and legally possess everything they need to assemble a ghost gun. Easy unfettered access to these kits, along with some basic tools and YouTube instructional videos, and rapidly advancing 3D printing technology make homemade firearm manufacturing an appealing new hobby for criminals and prohibited purchasers. These DIY kits are carefully designed by unscrupulous sellers to come as close to providing the end user with a firearm as possible without falling under the legal definition of a “firearm.” Ghost Guns threaten our public safety, undermine our gun safety laws, thwart law enforcement investigations, and allow criminals to end-run Maryland’s strong gun laws.

To provide just a few examples, six of which are from Maryland, of what the ghost gun problem looks like today:

- 1) In 2013, a CA man killed five people in Santa Monica with multiple homemade AR-15-style rifles.³
- 2) **In July 2016, a gunman in Baltimore used an AR-15-style rifle that he'd assembled to shoot at four police officers who returned fire and killed him.**⁴
- 3) In Nov 2017, a man with severe mental illness and a criminal history prohibiting him from purchasing firearms, got around CA’s tough gun laws by ordering parts to assemble an AR-15, and shot and killed 5 people and injured 18, including 7 children, at Rancho Tehama Reserve.⁵
- 4) In Jan 2018, a South Jersey man was arrested for unlawfully manufacturing and selling ghost guns out of his home.⁶
- 5) Also, in Jan 2018, the WSJ reported in an article titled, “The Rise of Untraceable ‘Ghost Guns,’” about a man manufacturing untraceable firearms in the Los Angeles machine shop where he worked, who had sold 5 weapons to a convicted felon turned gun trafficker and offered to deliver 100 more before he was caught.⁷
- 6) **One day after the Parkland, FL, school massacre, on Feb 15, 2018, a high school student at Clarksburg High School in Montgomery County, MD, was arrested for bringing in a handgun he built at home using tools from a home improvement store. An AR-15 rifle was also found to be in mid assembly at his home.**⁸
- 7) One year ago, a Dallas man was sentenced to eight years in prison, after he was arrested in 2017 with a partially 3D-printed rifle and a hit list of lawmakers' addresses.⁹
- 8) **Also in Feb 2019, a US Coast Guard lieutenant, who had amassed an arsenal of firearms and gun components used to fabricate untraceable home-built weapons, was arrested in Greenbelt, Maryland by federal authorities who said he was planning a domestic terrorist attack.**¹⁰
- 9) In July 2019, a convicted felon, legally prohibited from possessing a firearm, killed his 84-year-old grandfather with a ghost gun in Virginia.¹¹

³ <https://www.latimes.com/local/la-xpm-2013-jun-12-la-me-santa-monica-gun-20130613-story.html>

⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/california-mass-shooter-made-his-own-killing-machines-n821516>

⁵ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/california-mass-shooter-made-his-own-killing-machines-n821516>

⁶ https://www.nj.com/atlantic/2018/01/man_was_building_selling_dozens_of_ghost_guns_out.html

⁷ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-rise-of-untraceable-ghost-guns-1515061800>

⁸ <https://www.germantownpulse.net/single-post/2018/04/12/Germantown-Teen-Who-Brought-%E2%80%9CGhost-Gun%E2%80%9D-to-Clarksburg-High-School-to-Expected-to-Plead-Guilty>

⁹ https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/14/us/dallas-man-3d-printed-gun-prison-sentence/index.html?fbclid=IwAR2fv9bxS6LX X9mH5HnlwfrKauoSEtrYwNNPvr_N_EYE0zK_qNZjuBYcxSE

¹⁰ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/coast-guard-officer-accused-of-planning-terror-attack-amassed-an-arsenal-1155078965>

¹¹

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/angry-over-being-kicked-out-he-shot-his-grandfather--then-tried-to-cut-off-the-84-year-olds-head/2019/02/08/756084fa-2b0d-11e9-b011-d8500644dc98_story.html?fbclid=IwAR1REc9 y2b2h7dSifAYTkYNDaP_iFwL-4gK8TEsbkXMTtpj72866qJHp9vM

- 10) **On August 13, 2019, police found a loaded “ghost gun” with a high-capacity magazine attached, as well as cash and drugs, on an Edgewood man sleeping on a sidewalk in Bel Air, Maryland.**¹²
- 11) In November 2019, a ghost gun was used in the Santa Clarita school shooting, where the gunman shot five classmates, killing two.¹³
- 12) **In December 2019, a Montgomery County, Maryland, man who sold the illegal guns to drug dealers, heroin users, robbers and gang members, was sentenced to nine years after the State’s Attorney and County police worked two years to take this “purveyor of ghost guns” off the streets, meaning that “our region has one less source for illegal guns.”**¹⁴
- 13) In 2020, on New Year’s Day, a couple shot and killed a woman in Rhode Island with a 3D printed gun.¹⁵
- 14) **In January of this year, the FBI arrested three white supremacists in Maryland, ahead of a MLK Day gun rights rally in VA, who were in possession of a fully automatic homemade machine gun.**¹⁶

That’s not at all an exhaustive list, just a few news reports that were easy to find online.

Across the country, we not only have a gun violence crisis, we have a crisis of unsolved shootings. In American cities hit hardest by gun violence, and especially in Baltimore, the odds that police will solve a shooting are “abysmally low and dropping.”¹⁷ Already, people who shoot someone are about half as likely to be arrested as people who kill or assault someone with other weapons. With most cases, when police find a gun at a crime scene, they can use the serial numbers to do a trace to learn about where it came from and about gun trafficking patterns. With ghost guns, they can’t, which means they have no leads and there will be even more unsolved murders.

Just like with gun violence, the burden of unsolved shootings disproportionately impacts black and brown communities. According to FBI data, the entire decline in the “solve rate” for murders since the 1980s seems to be explained by a drop of more than 20% in the murder clearance rates for black and brown victims. When someone is shot and killed, white victims can expect an arrest 53% of the time, but if the victim is black or Hispanic, the arrest rate is only 35%.¹⁸

The systemic failure to solve gun crimes isn’t just heartbreaking for families and communities, it fuels more violence. Shooters walk free, getting away with their crimes, people lose faith in the police, and some decide to try to find justice on their own. Baltimore’s murder clearance rate is among the worst in the country.¹⁹ There are already too many unsolved murders in our city without making investigations more difficult, which the proliferation of ghost guns undoubtedly will do.

Gun traffickers can make a lot of money selling ghost guns, especially in states like ours with stronger gun laws. Like another bill Moms Demand Action is supporting this session—to close the background check loophole by requiring a

¹²

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/harford/aegis/cng-ag-belair-gun-arrest-0816-20190816-kqoovj7jhzgbxful3qriywzrme-story.html>

¹³

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-11-21/santa-clarita-shooting-45-caliber-gun-saugus-high-attack-a-ghost-gun-sheriff-says> & <https://www.thetrace.org/2019/11/santa-clarita-school-shooting-ghost-gun>

¹⁴ <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/man-gets-9-years-in-prison-in-ghost-guns-case/2182577/>

¹⁵

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/police-charge-jack-doherty-and-shaylyn-moran-with-murdering-woman-with-3d-printed-gun?ref=scroll>

¹⁶ <https://www.thetrace.org/2020/01/white-supremacists-the-base-fbi-virginia-diy-ghost-gun>

¹⁷ <https://www.thetrace.org/features/murder-solve-rate-gun-violence-baltimore-shootings>

¹⁸ <https://www.thetrace.org/features/murder-solve-rate-gun-violence-baltimore-shootings>

¹⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2018/investigations/where-murders-go-unsolved>

criminal check on gun transfers by unlicensed, private sellers, SB958 would ensure that deadly weapons don't fall into the hands of people prohibited from possessing a firearm who are seeking to circumvent state law.

We have a lot of work to do in Maryland to fix our gun violence problem. We all know there is no one solution to the levels of gun violence we experience. However, preventing access to ghost guns and 3D printed guns is a critical step toward ensuring the safety of our state. Please support SB958 to regulate the DIY manufacture of undetectable and untraceable firearms, helping to keep firearms out of dangerous hands. Thank you for your time.