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*Written Testimony of Katie Novotny in Opposition of SB329*

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February 22, 2022

I am a member of multiple gun rights organizations. I am a certified Range Safety Officer and an avid firearms collector. I oppose SB329.

This bill is completely unnecessary and convoluted. Rather than legislating blanket bans, and then providing complicated exceptions, if the intent is to prevent voter intimidation, a simple ban on brandishing firearms at a polling place would be adequate. In fact, it is already illegal to participate in intimidation tactics at a polling place, and intimidating acts with a firearm would certainly fall under this umbrella, making this bill unnecessary.

Furthermore, attempts at voter intimidation are very rare in Maryland. The Baltimore Sun article (<https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-pol-few-incidents-of-voter-intimidation-20201211-62xuahitendlbdz7nu2svqcscy-story.html>) dated December 11, 2020 titled “Few Incidents of Voter Intimidation or Harassment Reported in Maryland” even emphasizes this. This article reports only 27 complaints of possible voter intimidation or harassment. Of the examples given, none involved firearms. The biggest threat seemed to be from misleading robocalls.

Denying those who have passed Maryland’s incredibly rigorous wear and carry permitting process the right to carry at a polling place, when they have been acknowledged by the state to possess special need is completely unnecessary. If a person is carrying concealed, no one else will be aware, and therefore cannot be intimidated. The fact is that even here in Maryland, some people are granted the right to carry. The mere possibility of a person lawfully carrying a concealed firearm is not a threat, nor should it be intimidating. Everyday these people are in line behind you at the grocery store, the dry cleaners, and other everyday places, with no negative outcomes. Polling places are no different.

This bill also does not require armed, or even unarmed security, to guarantee the safety of those at polling places. Instead, it leaves the safety of all in the hands of election judges who must rely upon calling the police. Gun Free Zones are known favored targets for armed attacks. Furthermore, those who do regularly carry a firearm, may be required to leave it in their vehicle, parked an appropriate distance from the polling location, making it a target for theft, rather than safely on their person. If they instead choose to leave it at home, these people with known enhanced risk are then vulnerable while traveling to, from, and within, the polling location.

The allowance for off duty police to be allowed to carry, yet to wear their badge if they are, is simply absurd. That is akin to a scarlet letter. It is a mark to anyone who has familiarized themselves with the language of this bill, that this person has a firearm. It is also pandering to the community that is seen as supporting police officers. “Look! We are allowing THEM to carry, please don’t oppose this bill!”

This bill is unnecessary, overly complicated, and frankly a solution in search of a problem. It unfairly targets lawful gun owners, while doing nothing to address real sources of voter intimidation or harassment. Because of these reasons above, I request an unfavorable report.

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