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The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Jeff Waldstreicher
Senate Bill 86 – Rifles and Shotguns – Possession – Age Requirement
(Raise the Age Act of 2023)

February 7, 2023

Chairman Smith & Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

Between last session and this one, there were a series of mass shootings. They were in very different places in very different circumstances, but they shared one important thing in common.

Let's start with Buffalo, New York, my wife's hometown and a city I love. Now I'm going to depart from the recent protocol here and use the suspect's name. I apologize to the victims and their families, but I pray they know I'm doing it for an important reason. Payton Gendron was his name, and he believed in the conspiracy theory of White genocide. He brought an AR-15, modified to accept 30-round magazines, to a Topps supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood. I know exactly where that Topps is. He started streaming on Twitch, screamed the N-word at his victims, and murdered 10 people. All 10 were Black. Payton Gendron purchased the AR-15 legally. *He was 18 years old.*

Next came Uvalde, Texas. That's where Salvador Ramos attended elementary school, middle school, and high school. He was bullied as a child. Later, he had a reputation for live-streaming animal abuse, sending inappropriate text messages to women, and posting Instagram photos of semiautomatic rifles. In May of last year, he returned to his own elementary school. He murdered 19 children, ages 9 to 11. That's the same age as my younger son. He also killed two teachers. Salvador Ramos purchased his Smith & Wesson and Daniel Defense semiautomatic weapons legally. *He was 18 years old.*

Travel with me now to Highland Park, Illinois, outside of Chicago. Chicago is a beautiful city in the summer, but on July 4th last year, Highland Park became a nightmare. Robert Eugene Crimo III had a troubled childhood and gravitated toward neo-fascist memes and mass shooter ideation. He brought an M&P-15 and 30-round magazines to the Independence Day parade and began shooting. He injured 48 people and murdered 7. The dead ranged in age from 8 to 88. Robert Crimo purchased the M&P-15 legally. When his permit was granted, *he was 19 years old.*

3 mass shootings. In 3 months. In our country, just last year. And the common thread, obvious to all. All three murderers obtained their weapons before they were 21 years of age.

Before they could smoke. Before they could drink alcohol. And, importantly, before they could purchase a handgun.

That's right. In Maryland, it is not legal to purchase, possess, or own a handgun until you're 21. But you can purchase a shotgun, long gun, or semi-automatic rifle at that age. That is simply nonsensical. Gun violence in all forms plagues our state, and as many of you know, I've strongly supported increased accountability for illegal guns of all forms, including former Governor Hogan's crime package. But if we're to ensure that Maryland is safe from mass shootings in particular, we must make our long gun statutory framework fully analogous to our handgun statutory framework.

Now that you know what's in the bill, it's important to see what this bill does NOT do. Under current law, there are clear and enumerated exceptions to the law disallowing hand guns before the age of 21. It allows a person under 21 to go to the range while accompanied, to hunt while accompanied, to participate in marksmanship while accompanied. It allows for a person under 21 to carry as a police officer or member of the armed services. And it allows for self-defense.

Those carve outs are current law. Under Senate Bill 86, those same exceptions carry over line-by-line to long guns. And so this bill does not impact our armed forces or police officers. It does not impact a dad taking his son hunting, a mom taking her daughter to the range, or a coach taking his student to marksmanship competitions. It does not impact the right to self-defense.

Maryland is falling behind on this policy. Seven states—including Republican controlled Florida—already make their handgun and long gun laws analogous. Now is the time for Maryland to do the same, before the next mass shooting is ours.

I respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 86.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Waldstreicher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Jeff Waldstreicher