



# HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

COURAGE HONOR INTEGRITY

**Senate Bill 86 – Oppose**

## Rifles and Shotguns – Possession – Age Requirement

### Letter of Opposition to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 7, 2023

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I write today to oppose Senate Bill 86 as an overreaching and unconstitutional impediment on the rights of citizens under the age of 21 to keep and bear arms.

As the elected Sheriff of Harford County with over 38 years of experience in law enforcement and public safety, I believe it is the right of all law-abiding citizens to own firearms.

Many Maryland politicians will tout the “success” of legislation such as the Firearms Safety Act of 2013 and are not shy to falsely espouse such efforts as “common sense” gun safety laws. It is telling that they stand by these claims even in the face of unprecedented levels of violence committed in our State by career criminals who have no interest in abiding by any rules imposed by our legislature.

Looking at the ten years since the Maryland Gun Firearms Safety Act became law, we need only look at homicides in Baltimore City, which continues to increase going from a low of 197 in 2011 to an average of 340 per year for each of the last five years, to see legislation targeting firearms does not work. I would like to add this increase in homicides has occurred while the population of the city has decreased year after year.

These “gun safety” measures have had no effect addressing the problem of crimes committed with firearms in our state, yet we are here again this year



introducing legislation, similar to those measures from 2013, that target law-abiding citizens, infringe on constitutional rights and do absolutely nothing to address the real problem- which are the criminals committing violent crimes with firearms.

If this legislative body is serious about reducing the number of homicides and non-fatal shootings, we must focus our attention on holding the criminals who are committing these acts of violence accountable, not an 18-year-old who wants to purchase and legally possess a firearm and ammunition for sport, personal protection, hunting, their collection, or whatever their interest might be.

The latest available FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Data (2020) for Maryland showed there were a total of 573 murders in Maryland, 468 by handgun and 68 by knives in 2019. This compared to 15 individuals murdered by a rifle and four by a shotgun during the same calendar year.

Looking at historical FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Data (2010 - 2014) for the entire Country shows this is not an anomaly, but more of the norm. For this five-year snapshot, rifles and shotguns combined accounted for less than 5% of the total murders committed in our Nation. For each of these years, knives averaged 13%, hands and feet (personal) averaged 5.6% and blunt objects averaged 4%. All of these present higher threats to public safety by percentage than a shotgun or a rifle.

It's clear that additional regulations and age restrictions on rifles and shotguns are nothing more than hollow gestures that will do nothing to improve public safety in Maryland.

I urge the members of the committee to issue an unfavorable report on SB 86.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Jeffrey R. Gahler