

Testimony in support of HB 580 by Mindy Landau

Prohibiting carrying or display of a gun on premises of polling places

House Ways and Means Committee

My name is Mindy Landau, I am a resident of Potomac, MD in Montgomery County and I've lived and worked here as a federal employee, now retired, for 40 years. I am a co-founder of Brady United's Montgomery County Chapter, and co-lead for Brady Maryland. I'm writing this testimony on behalf of Brady Maryland and our state executive committee.

HB 580 will protect Maryland residents from an armed threat to one of America's most valuable democratic institutions: voting. When I perform my civic duty by voting, I know don't want to feel pressured, intimidated, or afraid. The voting polls are a place where we can peacefully disagree by voting for the candidates we support. I emphasize the word PEACEFULLY. Polling places are sacred to our democracy, the right of every individual to participate freely without threat. The presence of guns at or around polling places poses a danger to the process of fair and free elections simply because of the inherent threat to voters' emotional and physical well-being. We must protect the citizens of Maryland and their ability to vote freely and without intimidation or fear of being shot.

Let's call it what it is - armed intimidation is **voter suppression**, clear and simple. And suppression is not what Maryland is about. This is why Brady United Against Gun Violence appreciates and strongly supports Delegate Henson's bill.

By prohibiting firearms within 100 feet of a polling place, with a few reasonable exemptions, this bill will help to ensure we are protecting the sacred right to vote for our generation, and generations to come.

The stakes are high: even one violent incident could not only claim innocent lives but deter countless would-be voters from venturing to polling places in the future. Although we respect the Second Amendment and rights of gun owners under the constitution and laws of Maryland, that right must be exercised so as not to infringe on constitutional rights of others, including the right to vote. These harms to our democracy – the chilling effect that guns can have on other constitutional rights – are often overlooked, and I thank this committee for taking the step to discuss how intimidation by firearms - both obvious and subtle - threatens our democracy. Gun laws are designed to do more than to protect physical safety alone. They can and do help preserve public order and the freedom of others to peaceably assemble, speak, worship, and vote without intimidation.

As a country, much work has been done over the last 100 years to ensure that democracy, as represented by the right to vote, is accessible by all - regardless of their race, socioeconomic class or disability. We must continue this work today. There are still too many impediments to voting. Fear of intimidation with a gun is one that we can easily eliminate.