



COUNCILMEMBER LAURIE-ANNE SAYLES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

AT LARGE

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

February 13, 2024

TO: Senator Guy Guzzone
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Laurie-Anne Sayles
Montgomery County Council Member At-Large

RE: Senate Bill 784, *Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act*

I am writing to support **SB784 - Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act**. In the 3rd quarter of last year, rates of gun violence continued to rise in Montgomery County. There was a 40% increase in non-contact shootings, a 55% increase in accidental discharges, and, across the whole year, a 37.5% increase in homicides. Meanwhile, nationally, rates of gun violence fell 10.7%. These troubling numbers demonstrate that gun violence remains a significant concern despite our county's best efforts to minimize the proliferation of firearms.

Last year, a Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge struck down significant portions of a local bill, the SAFE Act, that restricted the possession of firearms in public places. Similarly, last year, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that Maryland's handgun qualification law was overly restrictive and unconstitutional. I am unconvinced that a reprieve will be granted, forcing us to look for alternative methods to curb incidents of gun violence.

Given the current direction of the United States Supreme Court and the limitation of Montgomery County to pass additional safety measures, it now rests on the State to protect its citizens from the plague of unrestricted firearm access. Not only does SB784 make it more expensive to purchase a firearm or ammunition, but it also directs funds from gun sales toward the Trauma Center at the University of Maryland, the Violence Intervention and Prevention Program, grants for survivors of homicides, and The Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention.

SB784 has significant potential to reduce the proliferation of gun violence by making it more expensive to purchase a firearm and ammunition. Also, by funding essential violence

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intervention and prevention programs, the bill makes it clear that Maryland is serious about prioritizing the safety of our residents over the profit of the firearm industry. For these reasons, I urge a favorable vote on SB 784, and I appreciate your consideration.

CC: Members of the Finance Committee