

Senate Bill 905 Public Safety – Extreme Risk Protective Orders – Review of Court Records
Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 27, 2024
Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 905.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, gun suicides reached an all-time high of 26,993 in 2022,¹ an average of one person every 19 minutes. Over 40% of the Marylanders who died by suicide in 2018 were gun deaths.²

In an effort to prevent gun violence and gun-related suicide, the General Assembly in 2018 passed legislation allowing interested persons to petition a court for an extreme risk protective order (ERPO) to prohibit the possession of a firearm by a person who poses a danger of causing injury to self or others. SB 905 would authorize researchers affiliated with institutions of higher education who are conducting academic or policy research to review ERPO court records.

Gun violence is a public health crisis requiring a comprehensive public health approach. Data is the foundation of this approach, allowing researchers to understand the size and scope of the problem, what puts communities at risk, and how to reduce those risks with policies and programs to keep our communities safe. Unfortunately, unlike most other ERPO states, Maryland does not explicitly allow researchers access to ERPO petition and court records. Without this important data, researchers are unable to effectively evaluate the effectiveness and equitable enforcement of this law.

ERPOs are a key strategy in Maryland's efforts to prevent gun violence and save lives. Access to reliable and timely data regarding the use of ERPOs is essential to ensuring this strategy is working as it should. For this reason, MHAMD supports SB 905 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2023/cdc-provisional-data-gun-suicides-reach-all-time-high-in-2022-gun-homicides-down-slightly-from-2021#:~:text=Overall%20gun%20death%20rate%20decreases,1.9%25%20in%202022%20from%202021.>

² <https://health.maryland.gov/bha/suicideprevention/Documents/2020%20Maryland%20State%20Suicide%20Prevention%20Plan.pdf>