

From the Desk of Marla Posey-Moss

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Constituent Testimony
Maryland House of Delegates
Judiciary Committee
HB 769 Harford County Parishioner Protection Pilot Program
February 24, 2019

OPPOSE

As a resident of Aberdeen, Harford County, I am writing this letter as testimony in opposition to House Bill 769, Harford County Parishioner Protection Pilot Program. This bill establishes a pilot program only in Harford County to allow the board of church or religious organization to authorize a person, without a permit, to carry or transport a handgun onto church property during services and gatherings with the intent to protect parishioners or oneself.

House bill 769 is plagued with a plethora of problems that rattles the conscience as it is poorly drafted, conceived and considered. First, to allow a board to authorize any person to carry a weapon onto church premises without the requirement of a permit implies that the authorized person doesn't need a background check. Conducting a background check is the underlying basis for verifying someone's mental state, criminal background and potential for causing a violent crime. Boards should not be granted any authority to place parishioners in harm by evading the law, regardless if it is a pilot program.

Second, this bill increases the likelihood of unintended consequences as it requires no training of the person selected for carrying and transporting a handgun. Accidental shootings of unfamiliar visitors or trigger-happy parishioners in defense of themselves can turn a peaceful church service into a prison riot. If the board cannot establish or implement emergency plans to properly safeguard its parishioners then they should consider sharing security guards with another congregation.

Third, churches and other religious organizations don't carry appropriate insurances to cover lethal or fatal accidents like law enforcement agencies. Increased law suits and negative stigma is not what Harford County needs in our faith community. A bill of such magnitude ought to have been vetted by clergy of predominantly African-American Churches, Jewish Synagogues, Catholic Churches, the only Mosque in Harford County and other mainstream houses of faith but it wasn't. While I sit as a 4th-year board member of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Harford County, I cannot see such a bill having favorable support countywide, especially if residents were aware of it. Mandating churches to assume full responsibilities like a law enforcement agency is simply out of their purview.

Fourth, the existing overreach into places of worship include schools associated with churches that are on church property, day cares, voting precincts, cafeterias and the general public. The language of this bill includes a board authorized person transporting a handgun to and from services and gatherings of the church or a religious organization. Hence, the Harford County Delegation wants to authorize church officials to allow their youth groups on fieldtrips at public venues and congregants at gatherings of a church sponsored event at a community restaurant to be escorted by a gun-toting, non-permitted individual that has no background check or training. This bill is ill wrought with no consideration of the increased dangers it poses to Harford County residents.

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Lastly, the term, religious organizations, lacks definition. Does this include seminary schools, Catholic Charities or even the Order of the Eastern Stars? This bill doesn't even deserve to be put to referendum. It is strictly a bill to circumvent the law and to put weapons into the hands of people who may not be eligible, deserving or altogether sane enough to carry and transport a handgun. **Again, as an individual resident of Harford County, I strongly urge an unfavorable report for House Bill 769 and help constituents here in Harford County protect themselves from BAD LEGISLATION.**

Sincerely,

Marla Posey-Moss

Marla Posey-Moss
Harford County Resident