



SAFEGUARDING SURVIVORS:

Examining Domestic Violence Protective Order Firearm Removal Practices to Improve Safety Outcomes

**A STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF MARYLAND'S
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FIREARM SURRENDER PROCESS**

23 Counties and Baltimore City | One System Under Review

Prepared by BWJP in partnership with Community Legal Services

JUNE 2026

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Firearm surrender at the intersection of domestic violence is among the highest-stakes processes in our legal and public safety systems. The risks are not abstract. Every gap in this process carries life-or-death consequences. It is because of the honesty, vigilance, and commitment of those who contributed to this assessment that we can confront these realities with the rigor and clarity they demand. Finally, to everyone who contributed their time by participating in a listening session, interview, convening, or survey — thank you for your trust and for your courage to imagine a safer Maryland.

¹ A note on the language used in this report. The term “survivor” is used predominantly in this report because it conveys healing and resilience. However, the criminal justice system uses the term “victim” most often and the term for a person who files a petition for a protective order is a “petitioner.” The terms “victim” and “petitioner” are used within those contexts.

Executive Summary

This literature review showed that access to a firearm raises the risk that intimate partner violence will be fatal five-fold and when an incident of intimate partner violence involves the use of a firearm, the chances that interaction will end in death increases up to 41 times.

671

firearm fatalities in Maryland in 2024,
~55% of them homicides

75%

of Maryland domestic violence homicides
(2022-23) involved a firearm

98.18%

of 2025 final protective orders
directed firearm surrender

In 2024, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation to create the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention within the Maryland Department of Health (MDH-CFVPI). The MDH-CFVPI was created in accordance with Objective 5.3 of the Moore-Miller 2024 Strategic Plan to “Follow the data to reduce recidivism and deter crime in the first place.”² As a part of the Center’s efforts, the MDH-CFVPI issued a Request for Applications for a nonprofit organization to lead a statewide domestic violence protective order (DVPO) firearm surrender process needs assessment and complete a written analysis and report of the findings and recommendations. In response to this request, the Battered Women’s Justice Project (BWJP), together with its principal partner Community Legal Services (CLS), committed to leading a comprehensive statewide DVPO firearm surrender process needs assessment of Maryland’s twenty-three counties and Baltimore City.

² Maryland Department of Health. (2026, February 3). Firearm violence data dashboard [Interactive dashboards]. <https://health.maryland.gov/dataoffice/mdh-dashboards/Pages/firearm-violence.aspx>.

Domestic violence and firearm violence remain urgent public health issues in Maryland. According to the Maryland Department of Health Firearm Violence Data Dashboard, there were 671 firearm fatalities in 2024, of which approximately 55% were homicides, and 780 emergency department visits for non-fatal firearm injuries, illustrating the persistent toll firearms take on families and communities across the state. Furthermore, of the 431 firearm-related homicides in Maryland in 2023, a minimum of 5.5% had a known precipitating factor related to intimate partner violence.³ According to the Maryland Domestic Violence Fatality Review State Implementation Team's report on 2022-2023 data, 75% of domestic violence homicides in Maryland were committed with a firearm.⁴ The intersection between domestic violence and firearm violence is not unique to Maryland. BWJP conducted a national literature review of the intersection of domestic violence and firearms. This literature review showed that access to a firearm raises the risk that intimate partner violence will be fatal five-fold and when an incident of intimate partner violence involves the use of a firearm, the chances that interaction will end in death increases up to 41 times.⁵ Throughout the United States, more than half of intimate partner homicides are committed with a firearm.⁶

Under Maryland law, in temporary domestic violence protective order cases, judges have the discretion to order a respondent to surrender firearms and prohibit their possession or purchase of firearms.⁷ By contrast, in final domestic violence protective order cases, respondents are required to surrender firearms and are prohibited from possessing or purchasing firearms while the protective order is in effect.⁸ This sounds simple enough, but the question remains:

Is the current DVPO firearm surrender process keeping survivors safe?

To answer this question, BWJP employed research strategies including listening sessions, interviews, surveys, and a statewide in-person convening. The listening sessions used a qualitative system-mapping process facilitated by BWJP and partners. The process consisted of a series of ten regional mapping sessions, each involving either a single county or multiple counties within a single geographic region of Maryland, and an “open” mapping session for professionals who could not participate in the geographically-specific sessions. Most mapping sessions used a Maryland DVPO process map as a structured guide to walk through stages of the protection order process and identify what occurs in Maryland's different regions. BWJP conducted

³ Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, (2024). 2022-2023 DVFRSIT Report, <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>.

⁴ Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, (2024). 2022-2023 DVFRSIT Report, <https://www.mnadv.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-DVFRSIT-ReportFinal.pdf>

⁵ Campbell, J., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S. A., Manganello, J., Xu, X., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Laughon, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case control study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(7), 1089–1092.

⁶ Fridel, E. E., & Fox, J. A. (2019). Gender differences in patterns and trends in U.S. homicide, 1976–2017. *Violence and Gender*, 6(1), 27–36. Websdale, N., Celaya, A., & Mayer, S. (2019). The domestic violence fatality review clearinghouse: Introduction to a new national data system with a focus on firearms. *Injury Epidemiology*, 25(Suppl 1), 6.

⁷ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-505(a)(2)(viii).

⁸ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-506(f).

a listening session for petitioners who had received a Maryland protective order within the past five years, two listening sessions for law enforcement professionals, and one for culturally specific service providers. Additionally, interviews were conducted with a respondent in a protective order proceeding and with professionals who served all of Maryland rather than a specific region. This report also includes findings from the in-person convening held on April 28, 2026, during which professionals throughout Maryland involved in the DVPO process or firearm violence prevention assembled to discuss key challenges in their specific jurisdictions, and propose actionable items to make their communities safer. Lastly, this report includes findings from a statewide multi-disciplinary survey on the DVPO process and firearm surrender.

Firearm surrender largely operates on an “honor system.”

The listening sessions, interviews, convening, and survey (collectively “the assessment”) revealed that community stakeholders across agencies, courts, and community organizations are strongly committed to survivor safety and improving the DVPO process.⁹ The system functions well in many respects, particularly in early intervention and advocacy support. At the same time, inconsistencies in procedures, interagency communication, and data collection limit the effectiveness and equity of firearm-related protections. From the assessment, several key findings emerged:

Firearm surrender largely operates on an “honor system.” There are no clear deadlines for surrendering firearms, no consistent verification mechanisms, and no reliable court-based compliance monitoring. Participants expressed frustration that if a respondent simply claims they have no firearms or that they already transferred them to another person, law enforcement has limited recourse.

Enforcement is strongest early — then drops sharply. Firearm recovery is most effective at the Temporary Protective Order (TPO) stage, when law enforcement serves the order in person. At the Final Protective Order (FPO) stage — when firearm surrender is mandatory by law — enforcement, compliance verification, and follow-up are consistently weaker, and law enforcement is often not involved at all.

Communication between agencies is fragmented, manual, and largely one-directional. Most information sharing between courts, law enforcement, and advocacy agencies relies on paper-based processes. Courts generally do not receive confirmation of whether firearms were surrendered, meaning judges have no visibility into respondents’ compliance with their own orders.

Improvement of data on firearm surrender outcomes is needed. While Maryland courts track and publish robust data on protective orders generally, there is no systematic tracking of critical data points such as how

⁹ See Appendix H.

many firearms are surrendered at either the TPO or FPO stage or the number of search warrants sought to enforce surrender. Without this data, it is impossible to measure the system's effectiveness.

Survivors face significant access and equity barriers throughout the process. Without consistent firearm surrender verification and accountability measures, the onus is often on survivors to ask for firearm surrender to be ordered, to determine whether surrender has been effectuated, and to pursue violations of the firearm prohibition. Cultural concerns, immigration fears, and threats of retaliation further deter survivors — especially those from marginalized communities — from fully engaging with or disclosing firearm-related risks within the process.

From the wealth of information gathered throughout the assessment, BWJP developed several recommendations for the MDH-CFVPI's consideration. Some of the recommendations can be achieved quickly, while others require additional time and resources:

Standardize Firearm Surrender Protocols — Establish a uniform, statewide process for firearm surrender that includes formalized inquiries into respondent firearm access, pre-service interviews with petitioners, consistent standards for including firearm prohibitions in TPOs, clear compliance deadlines, multilingual written advisement to respondents about their obligations, and integration of reliable survivor advocacy throughout the process.

Implement Accountability and Compliance Requirements — Shift firearm surrender from an informal “honor system” toward court-based enforcement. This means requiring documented, sworn proof of compliance from respondents; establishing clear deadlines for surrender; and creating enforcement catalysts (such as warrants or contempt proceedings) when deadlines are missed.

Expand Technology and Infrastructure — Replace paper-heavy, manual processes with electronic court-to-law enforcement data systems. Consider expanding electronic filing of DVPO petitions statewide. Contemplate increasing the role of the Maryland Gun Center as a centralized, real-time compliance tracking hub, including making TPO-stage reporting mandatory, and explore how some of this data could be integrated into the MDH-CFVPI Firearm Violence Data Dashboard.

Increase Workforce and Capacity — Explore alternative service of process methods (e.g., electronic service) to preserve in-person law enforcement resources for the highest-risk cases. Increase storage capacity for surrendered firearms in rural jurisdictions. Build multidisciplinary communities of practice to share and scale effective strategies and address emerging challenges.

Invest in Survivor-Centered Improvements — Create plain-language, multilingual informational materials available at all courthouses and accessible online. Construct a real-time “victim notification system” to alert survivors when firearms are surrendered as well as when they are returned to the respondent.

Together, these recommendations lay the groundwork for strengthening the existing firearm surrender process. At the same time, the recommendations offer strategies Maryland can use to develop better-coordinated, community-led solutions to domestic violence that promote statewide safety.



Introduction

Introduction

Every year in Maryland, survivors of domestic violence navigate a legal system designed to protect them — seeking protective orders, disclosing dangerous information about firearms, and placing their trust in courts, law enforcement, prosecutors, and advocates to follow through on their behalf. Too often, gaps in that system leave them exposed. In 2024, the Maryland General Assembly took a significant step to close those gaps by establishing the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention (CFVPI) within the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), recognizing firearm violence as a public health crisis that demands coordinated, evidence-based action. As part of this effort, BWJP conducted a comprehensive statewide needs assessment of Maryland’s DVPO and firearm surrender processes across all 23 counties and Baltimore City.

Drawing on regional listening sessions with multidisciplinary practitioners, dedicated sessions with law enforcement and culturally specific providers, a survivor listening session, a respondent interview, a statewide in-person convening attended by 75 professionals, and a statewide survey, the assessment was designed to illuminate both the strengths of Maryland’s existing system and the gaps that put survivors at risk.

This report is intended to serve as a practical resource for policymakers, court administrators, law enforcement agencies, advocacy organizations, and state agencies including the MDH. It documents what is working, where the system is falling short, and what concrete steps — grounded in evidence and the on-the-ground voices of those invested in the work — can move Maryland closer to a future where every survivor who seeks protection through a protective order can trust that the order will be enforced.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Health Impact of Firearms in the Context of Domestic Violence

Numerous studies reveal the tremendous public health impact—fatalities, serious injuries, as well as emotional and psychological harm—caused by domestic violence perpetrators against intimate partners, children, first responders, and the wider community. In the majority of cases, firearms are the weapon of

choice when an abusive partner kills their current or former intimate partner.¹⁰ The presence of a firearm makes it five times more likely that a woman will be killed by her abusive male partner,¹¹ and firearms are used to commit more than half of all intimate partner homicides in the U.S.¹² Domestic violence incidents involving firearms are 12 times more likely to result in death than incidents involving other weapons or bodily force.¹³ Domestic violence homicides frequently target or include children. In one study, 31% of firearm homicides of children under the age of 13 were found to be related to intimate partner violence.¹⁴ In addition, the majority of children who are killed in mass shootings are killed by their family members.¹⁵ First responders, especially law enforcement officers, face a high risk of harm from domestic violence perpetrators with access to firearms. A plurality of line-of-duty deaths involve officers responding to domestic violence calls.¹⁶

Beyond their role in fatal violence, firearms are used by abusive partners to exercise power and control over their intimate partner. In one study of women in domestic violence shelters, 36.7% reported use of firearms against them by their intimate partners.¹⁷ Approximately 3% of alleged perpetrators in abusive partner intervention programs told researchers that they threatened, intimidated, or shot at their partners with a firearm.¹⁸ Data from a national, web-based survey of U.S. adults who experienced intimate partner violence established that approximately 9.8% of US adults have experienced nonfatal firearm abuse by an intimate partner (this includes having been threatened with a firearm, had a firearm used on them, or threatened by a partner who possessed or had easy access to a firearm).¹⁹

¹⁰ Petrosky, E., Blair, J. M., Betz, C. J., Fowler, K. A., Jack, S. P. D., & Lyons, B. H. (2017). Racial and ethnic differences in homicides of adult women and the role of intimate partner violence — United States, 2003–2014. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 66(28), 741–746. <https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6628a1>.

¹¹ Campbell, J., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., Glass, N., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S. A., Manganello, J., Xu, X., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Laughon, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case control study. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93(7), 1089–1092.

¹² Fridel, E. E., & Fox, J. A. (2019). Gender differences in patterns and trends in U.S. homicide, 1976–2017. *Violence and Gender*, 6(1), 27–36. Websdale, N., Celaya, A., & Mayer, S. (2019). The domestic violence fatality review clearinghouse: Introduction to a new national data system with a focus on firearms. *Injury Epidemiology*, 25(Suppl 1), 6.

¹³ Linda E. Saltzman, et al. (1992). Weapon involvement and injury outcomes in family and intimate assaults. 267 *JAMA* 3043, 3047.

¹⁴ Fowler, K. A., Dahlberg, L. L., Haileyesus, T., Gutierrez, C., & Bacon, S. (2017). Childhood firearm injuries in the United States. *Pediatrics*, 140(1), e20163486.

¹⁵ Emengo, P., Strobe, J. D., Sabapaty, A., et al. (2025). Victim-shooter relationships in mass shootings involving child victims. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 179(4), 474–475. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.6609>.

¹⁶ National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. (2024). 2023 end-of-year preliminary law enforcement fatalities report. <https://nleomf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-EOY-Fatality-Report-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁷ Sorenson, S. & Wiebe, D. (2004). Weapons in the lives of battered women. 94 *Am. J. Pub. Health* 1412, 1413 (2004) <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1448464/> (reporting that 36.7% of 417 residents of 67 California battered women's shelters stated that a firearm had been used against them by an intimate partner).

¹⁸ Rothman, E. F., Hemenway, D., Miller, M., & Azrael, D. (2005). Battersers' use of guns to threaten intimate partners. *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association* (1972), 60(1), 62–68.

¹⁹ Adhia, A., Kernic, M. A., Hemenway, D., Vavilala, M. S., & Rivara, F. P. (2021). Nonfatal use of firearms in intimate partner violence: Results of a national survey. *Preventive Medicine*, 147, 106500. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106500>.

Promising Interventions

DVPOs, especially when coupled with effective implementation of firearm relinquishment provisions, have been shown to reduce intimate partner homicide. One study revealed that laws prohibiting possession of firearms while subject to a DVPO are associated with 9% reductions in intimate partner homicide. Importantly, that protection was evident only if the statutory DVPO prohibitions included dating partners (-10%) and ex parte orders (known as temporary protective orders in Maryland) (-12%).²⁰

Three other studies, two looking at state-level and one at city-level outcomes, also found that statutes prohibiting possession of firearms by domestic violence offenders were effective in reducing intimate partner homicide rates.²¹

A growing body of research has studied the efficacy of efforts to implement such prohibitions. In one study of two California counties, approximately 23% and 51% of respondents identified as possessing firearms actually relinquished them. Notably, the causes of non-relinquishment/recovery of firearms were found to be either lack of service of the order or service by a non-law enforcement entity.²² That challenge is one of many that researchers have identified as limiting the effectiveness of statutory prohibitions and undermining accountability. One study reviewed the literature and identified several of these challenges, including: “judicial discretion and the lack of compliance requirements—including clearly defined protocols regarding the timing, verification, and enforcement of relinquishment;” lack of clear, concrete requirements for judges, law enforcement, and respondents/defendants regarding their responsibilities after an order has been issued; and unclear enforcement protocols.²³

One promising approach to implementation, subject to formal evaluation, is King County, Washington, which could serve as a model or source of inspiration for Maryland. The King County Regional Domestic Violence Firearms Enforcement Unit, a multidisciplinary team of law enforcement, advocates, court personnel, and others, was shown to have increased both judicial enforcement and respondent compliance with orders to relinquish firearms. Implementation of this unit was associated with a greater likelihood that a DVPO would include an order to relinquish weapons, greater respondent compliance, and the actual relinquishment of one or more weapons.²⁴

²⁰ Zeoli, A. M., McCourt, A., Buggs, S., Frattaroli, S., Lilley, D., & Webster, D. W. (2018). Analysis of the strength of legal firearms restrictions for perpetrators of domestic violence and their association with intimate partner homicide. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 187(11), 2365–2374. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwx362>.

²¹ Vigdor, E. R., & Mercy, J. A. (2003). Disarming batterers: The impact of domestic violence firearm laws. In J. Ludwig & P. J. Cook (Eds.), *Evaluating gun policy* (pp. 157–214). Brookings Institution Press. Vigdor, E. R., & Mercy, J. A. (2006). Do laws restricting access to firearms by domestic violence offenders prevent intimate partner homicide? *Evaluation Review*, 30(3), 313–346. Zeoli, A. M., & Webster, D. W. (2010). Effects of domestic violence policies, alcohol taxes and police staffing levels on intimate partner homicide in large US cities. *Injury Prevention*, 16(2), 90–95. <https://doi.org/10.1136/ip.2009.024620>.

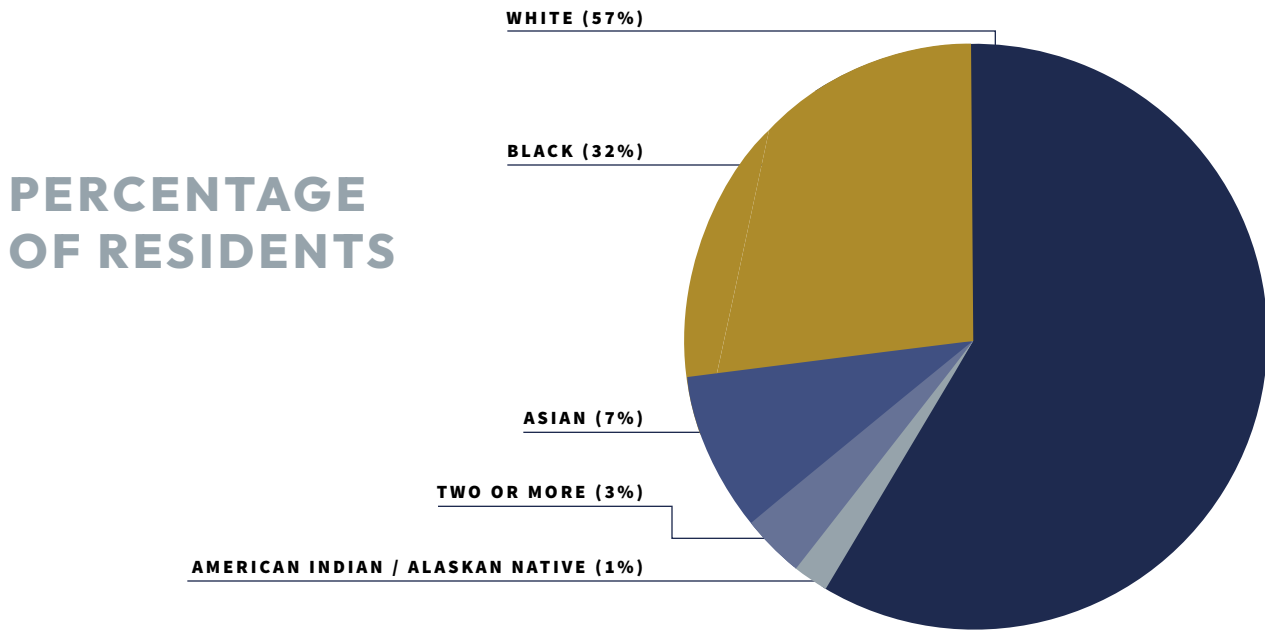
²² Wintemute, G. J., Frattaroli, S., Claire, B. E., Vittes, K. A., & Webster, D. W. (2014). Identifying armed respondents to domestic violence restraining orders and recovering their firearms: Process evaluation of an initiative in California. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(2), e113–e118. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2013.301484>.

²³ Oliphant, S. N., & Zeoli, A. M. (2024). State efforts to enforce firearm dispossession through relinquishment laws. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 23(4), 893–918. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12677>.

²⁴ Ellyson, A. M., Rowhani-Rahbar, A., Rivara, F. P., & Kernic, M. A. (2023). Firearm restrictions in domestic violence protection orders: Implementation, vetting, compliance, and enforcement. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 22(4), 767–791. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12639>.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND DATA OVERVIEW

Maryland has a population size of approximately 6,177,224 people as of the 2020 U.S. Census.²⁵ Maryland is known for its diversity, and is home to people from different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The state is also known for its geographic diversity from rural communities in Western Maryland and the Eastern Shore, to Baltimore City and the Washington, D.C. suburbs. According to the 2020 U.S. Census data, Marylanders' composition is as follows:



In addition, 13.3% of Marylanders are Hispanic or Latino.²⁶ Using census data from 2019-2023, 16.3% of Marylanders are foreign born.²⁷ Furthermore, 20.6% of Marylanders speak a language other than English in their home.²⁸ In addition, 7.9% of those under the age of 65 have a disability.²⁹ While the median annual household income is high in Maryland at \$101,652 and 91.5% of households have internet, 9.1% of Marylanders live in poverty.³⁰

²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Maryland. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045224>.

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Maryland. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045224> (Hispanic/Latino is an ethnicity category that overlaps with race).

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Maryland. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045224>.

²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Maryland. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045224>.

²⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Maryland. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045224>.

³⁰ U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). QuickFacts: Maryland. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD/PST045224>.

There is some data on gun ownership in Maryland. According to a 2020 study by the Rand Corporation, 30.2% of households reported having guns.³¹ A report by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives stated that, in 2021, Maryland had 136,257 registered firearms.³²

Maryland courts produce a monthly report on protective order data. In 2025, 10,523 final protective orders were issued.³³ Of those orders, 98.18% of the orders included a direction for the respondent to surrender firearms.³⁴ However, a total of 12,984 protective orders were dismissed or denied, with 930 protective order cases being dismissed due to lack of service.³⁵

METHODOLOGY

System-Based Engagement

Identifying Key Stakeholders

BWJP employed a multi-faceted strategy to identify key stakeholders and engage them as part of this assessment. First, BWJP determined which community actors would likely be familiar with domestic violence, the protective order process, and firearms. From this, BWJP identified categories of potential stakeholders.³⁶ Second, BWJP staff researched these relevant community actors in each of Maryland's 23 counties as well as Baltimore City. These actors comprised the initial Stakeholder List that could be sorted by region, county/city, or discipline.

Determining Multiple Ways for Stakeholders to Participate

On October 17, 2025, BWJP, along with its consultants and partners, met with MDH-CFVPI to strategize on the best methods for securing stakeholder engagement. At this meeting, the group first reviewed the Stakeholder List, divided into regions, to determine whether any specific community partners were missing. Additional community partners were added to the Stakeholder List based on the group's professional contacts and knowledge of the DVPO process. The group also added statewide stakeholders who are involved in the firearm surrender process and stakeholders who may not traditionally be associated with the DVPO process but do routinely work with DV survivors in their communities, such as culturally specific providers. The group next determined the desired level of involvement for each community stakeholder by

³¹ Learish, J. (2022, April 14). Gun ownership rates by state. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/gun-ownership-rates-by-state/35/>.

³² Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. (2021). Firearms Commerce in the United States: Annual Statistical Update 2021. <https://www.atf.gov/media/16741/download>. Note, this by no means reflects the total number of firearms in Maryland as even some legal firearms do not need to be registered, such as handguns. Furthermore, it does not reflect firearms that are acquired illegally or are built illegally (i.e., ghost guns).

³³ This data was compiled by BWJP from the monthly reports found at: <https://www.courts.state.md.us/eservices/dvmonthlypublicreports>.

³⁴ This data was compiled by BWJP from the monthly reports found at: <https://www.courts.state.md.us/eservices/dvmonthlypublicreports>.

³⁵ This data was compiled by BWJP from the monthly reports found at: <https://www.courts.state.md.us/eservices/dvmonthlypublicreports>.

³⁶ See Appendix C for the list of categories of potential stakeholders.

determining their influence and interest in the DVPO and the firearm surrender processes.³⁷ In determining the level of involvement, the group considered specific communities served and decided that it would be beneficial to conduct a listening session for culturally specific providers to ensure that participation was equitable and represented the diversity of the population of Maryland.³⁸

Engagement Strategies

BWJP created and implemented a multi-layered outreach plan to encourage participation in the assessment from all 23 counties and Baltimore City. BWJP created a dedicated website, phone number, and email address for this assessment. Staff reached out to key individuals to participate in the listening sessions directly. Those who participated in the listening sessions were also invited to participate in the in-person convening. Attendees of the listening sessions and the in-person convening, along with the broader stakeholder list, were invited to participate in the survey.

Regional Listening Sessions

A visual diagram (a process map) detailing the Maryland DVPO process was first created, highlighting portions of the process that pertained to firearms.³⁹ CLS coordinated the first regional listening session with Prince George's County where BWJP refined this general map. The map was then used as a guide during the following regional listening sessions to highlight consistencies and differences throughout the various regions as well as bottlenecks and pain points in the process. The mapping process also highlighted areas where jurisdictions were utilizing innovative approaches to make the DVPO process safer.

Law Enforcement-Focused Listening Sessions

After conducting several regional listening sessions, the information obtained raised several questions for which law enforcement was the most likely source of information. BWJP determined that law enforcement-focused listening sessions on the DVPO and firearm surrender processes would be beneficial. BWJP hosted two such listening sessions, one for sheriff's offices and one for law enforcement departments. Specific questions tailored to law enforcement were developed and utilized in lieu of the process map.

Culturally Specific Provider-Focused Listening Sessions

In the planning meetings, BWJP, its partners and MDH-CFVPI discussed creating a listening session for culturally specific providers who work with survivors of domestic violence. These providers, working with survivors in specific communities in Maryland, brought lived experience and community expertise that ensured that these findings and recommendations support survivors across all communities. Specific questions tailored to culturally specific providers were developed and utilized in lieu of the process map.

³⁷ See Appendix C for a grid that determined stakeholder involvement due to their influence and interest.

³⁸ A list of the communities that the group prioritized can be found in Appendix C.

³⁹ See Appendix H.

In-Person Convening

On April 28, 2026, BWJP conducted an in-person convening in Annapolis, Maryland. The convening highlighted both state and national promising practices around DVPO and firearm surrender processes. Most importantly, this working convening brought together 75 stakeholders from across Maryland to synthesize common challenges and opportunities for improving the DVPO firearm surrender process. The stakeholders passionately strategized and identified their individual community's priority challenges and clearly articulated specific action items that they would take back to their jurisdictions to address those challenges.

Lived Experience Listening Sessions

To garner interest in the survivor/petitioner and respondent virtual listening sessions, BWJP utilized its partners CLS, Turn Around, Inc., House of Ruth Maryland, and MNADV to distribute this opportunity to their networks and on social media. Flyers and FAQs were developed (in English, Spanish and Chinese) explaining the purpose and scope of the listening sessions. The survivor/petitioner listening session was also offered to friends and family members of survivors and petitioners. BWJP contacted the abuse intervention providers statewide and informed them of this opportunity. ASL and other language interpretation were offered to ensure equitable involvement and a participation gift card was provided to those who attended. Core questions tailored to the specific participant group were developed by BWJP, approved by MDH-CFVPI, and were determined by the Maryland Department of Health's Institutional Review Board to qualify as exempt research in accordance with 45 C.F.R. 46.104(d)(2). Only three survivor/petitioners and one respondent self-selected to participate in the listening sessions. As a result, one survivor/petitioner listening session and one respondent interview were conducted using those core questions.

Statewide Surveys

BWJP conducted an anonymous, cross-sectional, web-based survey of petitioners, respondents, and stakeholders with experience in Maryland DVPO cases. The survey questions and methodology were approved by MDH-CFVPI, and were determined by the Maryland Department of Health's Institutional Review Board to qualify as exempt research in accordance with 45 C.F.R. 46.104(d)(2). Using role-based branching logic, participants completed role-specific modules addressing the DVPO process and firearm surrender enforcement based on the following roles: Survivors/Petitioners, Respondents, Law Enforcement Officers, Advocates/Community Partners, and Court Staff. The survey instrument began with an introduction and language to ensure that participants' informed consent was received. The questions limited participation to those who have had experience with Maryland DVPOs in the past five years. Participants then completed a 15 minute questionnaire, tailored to their role, regarding experiences with service of protective orders, firearm surrender, communication with other agencies, and perceived safety. The survey was open from May 15th through 29th, 2026.

Data was analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods, with open-ended responses coded thematically. Data analysis included descriptive statistics by role, cross-role comparisons on shared constructs, and thematic coding of open-ended responses. Findings from this survey were then generalized and reported in the aggregate only.

LIMITATIONS

The assessment provided important insight into Maryland's DVPO-related practices, but findings should be interpreted within these constraints:

- Not a full system census: The sessions reflect the perspectives of those present and do not capture every agency or role within the DVPO firearm-surrender ecosystem.
- Time-limited discussion: Most listening sessions were limited to 2 hours, with survivor and respondent discussions limited to 90 minutes. Furthermore, some participants were unable to stay for the full scheduled time, which may limit depth across all mapped stages. Participants were, however, encouraged to follow up with the facilitators if they had more to share.
- Qualitative, not outcome-evaluative: The listening sessions were exploratory and not designed to quantitatively measure compliance rates, survivor outcomes, or enforcement outcomes.
- Anonymized reporting: Because reporting is anonymized, specific operational concerns cannot be tied to a single agency for follow-up without additional engagement. Furthermore, we could not conduct targeted follow-up with those who did not take the survey due to the survey's anonymized nature.
- Varied participation: Participation varied by region and stakeholder group, resulting in over-representation of certain areas and stakeholder groups, and under-representation in others.
- Small survivor and respondent participation: Survivors and respondents were self-selected, and the sample size was small. This could be due to the virtual nature of the session, time constraints, and challenges with the sign-up process. Despite recruitment through abuse intervention programs, we only had one respondent who was interested in attending a listening session.
- Time limitations: The one year allotted to conduct this overall assessment proved challenging. Due to the approval process, we were only able to keep the survey open for two weeks, which included a holiday weekend. This further limited the ability to conduct follow-up and advertising.

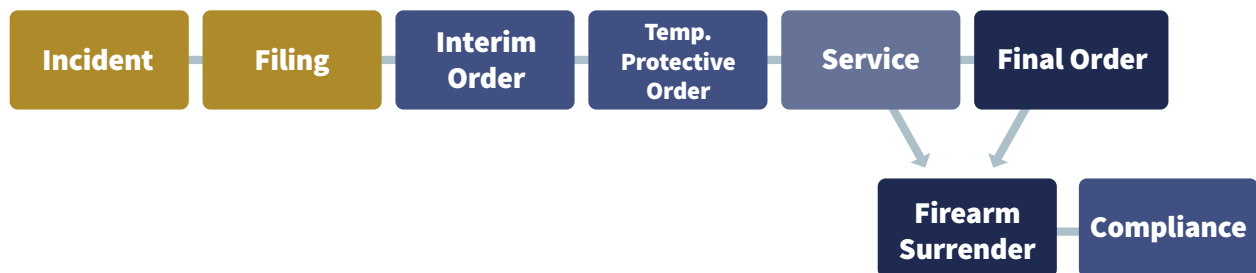


How the System Works

(Simplified Overview)

How the System Works

(Simplified Overview)



The Maryland statutory framework for the DVPO process is essential to understanding inconsistencies in policies and procedures across jurisdictions as well as opportunities to improve firearm surrender. The entire protective order process must be survivor-centered and effective. Without elements such as meaningful access to protective orders, effective service of process, and measures to assure accountability, firearm surrender cannot be attempted. Following is a brief overview of the DVPO process in Maryland:

Upon an incident of domestic violence, police may be called to the scene for assistance. Most law enforcement agencies are conducting lethality assessments and, as appropriate, making direct referrals to the domestic violence organization through their Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) protocol. If firearms are involved in the incident or are in plain view, law enforcement can seize those firearms. Regardless of police involvement, a survivor can seek a protective order. If the survivor needs immediate safety and the court is closed, the survivor can seek an Interim Protective Order (IPO) in-person with a Commissioner. The IPO lasts until the TPO hearing, or two business days. The IPO is sent to law enforcement for immediate personal service on the respondent.

⁴⁰ For a more detailed account of the DVPO process, see Appendices G and H.

⁴¹ Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence. (n.d.). Lethality assessment program. Retrieved June 22, 2026, from <https://www.mnadv.org/lethalityassessmentprogram/>.

⁴² Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-511.

⁴³ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-504.1(a).

⁴⁴ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-504.

⁴⁵ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-504(f)(1).

Key Takeaway: Interim protective orders cannot prohibit the respondent from possessing firearms.

The survivor can file for a TPO without an IPO, or the IPO could lead to the TPO hearing. The survivor must file a petition, which is most often done in-person at the courthouse. The survivor can go before a judge usually that same day, and the judge may grant a TPO. TPOs last for seven days and can be extended for good cause and are often extended for lack of service on the respondent. Due to a recent legislative change, as of October 1, 2026, the TPO can last up to fourteen days. In a TPO, the judge may order that the respondent surrender any firearms to law enforcement and refrain from possession of firearms for the duration of the order if the abuse consisted of:

[T]he use of a firearm by the respondent against a person eligible for relief; a threat by the respondent to use a firearm against a person eligible for relief; serious bodily harm to a person eligible for relief caused by the respondent; or a threat by the respondent to cause serious bodily harm to a person eligible for relief.

Key Takeaway: Firearm surrender is discretionary at the temporary protective order stage.

After a TPO is issued, it must be personally served on the respondent by law enforcement. If an IPO was personally served, the TPO may be served by mail or in court.⁴⁹ Survivors can request notification that service was effectuated.⁵⁰

FPOs may be granted by consent or upon a judicial finding by a preponderance of the evidence that the alleged abuse occurred.⁵¹ This standard is slightly higher than those for IPOs and TPOs that require a finding that there are “reasonable grounds” that the abuse occurred.⁵² FPOs generally last one year, but can last up to two years or be permanent under certain circumstances.⁵³ The FPO shall order the respondent to surrender firearms to law enforcement and refrain from possession of firearms for the duration of the order.⁵⁴ Law enforcement must give the respondent information on seeking return of their firearms after expiration of the protective order.⁵⁵ The Maryland Gun Center, operated by the Maryland State Police, is the statewide firearms enforcement center for the tracking, screening, and vetting of firearms surrendered under FPOs.⁵⁶

⁴⁶ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-504(a)(1). Survivors can request a protective order electronically from certain approved locations, such as a domestic violence program or a hospital in which case the TPO hearing is conducted remotely. Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-505.1(b).

⁴⁷ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-505(c). The duration of the TPO was recently amended by legislation, HB0497, which changes the duration to no longer than 14 days after issuance. Family Law – Temporary and Final Protective Orders – Duration, H.B. 0497, (2026). Maryland General Assembly. <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Legislation/Details/hb0497?ys=2026RS>.

⁴⁸ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-505(a)(2)(viii).

⁴⁹ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-505(b)(1)-(2).

⁵⁰ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-504(d)(1)(i).

⁵¹ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-506(c)(1)(ii).

⁵² Md. Code Ann., Family Law §§ 4-504.1(b), 4-505(a).

⁵³ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-506(j)-(k).

⁵⁴ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-506(f).

⁵⁵ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-506.1(a).

⁵⁶ Md. Code Ann., Public Safety § 5-802(a)(2).

Key Takeaway: Firearm surrender is mandatory at the final protective order stage

A petitioner can request that the protective order be extended for up to an additional two years.⁵⁷ Upon expiration of the protective order, firearms can be returned to the respondent so long as the respondent is not subject to a different FPO and is not otherwise legally prohibited from possessing firearms.⁵⁸

It is a crime in Maryland to possess a firearm when subject to a final protective order.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it is a misdemeanor to violate the firearm-possession prohibition in a TPO.⁶⁰

FIREARM SURRENDER AT EACH STAGE OF THE ORDER



Firearm surrender is mandatory at the final protective order stage — but enforcement is weakest exactly there.

KEY STATUTORY TAKEAWAYS

- TPOs last 7 days (extending to 14 days as of Oct. 1, 2026); FPOs generally last one year, up to two years, or permanent.
- The Maryland Gun Center (Maryland State Police) tracks surrendered firearms — but TPO-stage reporting to it is voluntary, not required.
- Possessing a firearm while subject to a final protective order is a crime; violating a TPO firearm prohibition is a misdemeanor.

⁵⁷ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-507(a).

⁵⁸ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-506.1(b).

⁵⁹ Md. Code Ann., Pub. Safety § 5-133(b)(4)(iii), (b)(14), (b-1) (including protective orders issued by other U.S. states or Tribal Nations). An exception to this prohibition is if the respondent is transporting firearms to law enforcement for the purposes of surrendering the firearms. Md. Code Ann., Pub. Safety § 5-133(e).

⁶⁰ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-509(a).



Survey Findings

Survey Findings

OVERVIEW

The survey was open between May 18, 2026, and May 29, 2026. A total of 328 people participated in the survey. The final analyzed sample included only participants who indicated in the initial screening questions that they had experience with DVPOs in Maryland and then provided responses to at least some of the substantive questions, resulting in an analyzed sample size of 108. Of the total sample, 26.9% (29) were petitioners, 3.7% (4) were respondents, 40.7% (44) were advocates, 10.2% (11) were law enforcement, and 18.5% (20) were a court or legal system actor. Participants from 19 counties, with 9.3% having statewide DVPO experience or assisting multiple counties throughout Maryland. The strongest showing of participants was from Montgomery County, Baltimore County, and Baltimore City.⁶¹

SYSTEM STAKEHOLDER-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Law Enforcement

The top barriers to firearm removal cited by law enforcement were respondents hiding or refusing to disclose firearms (88.8%), firearms stored elsewhere (66.7%), and legal limits without a warrant (55.6%). Notably, law enforcement self-reported that they rarely seek search warrants when firearms are not surrendered: specifically 66.7% say they do so only rarely, highlighting a critical gap between legal authority and actual enforcement.

Law enforcement noted that staffing limitations prevent service of TPOs, cause delays in METERS entry, and are one of the biggest barriers to removing firearms.⁶² Furthermore, 66.6% of law enforcement noted that storage capacity is a small or moderate problem in their jurisdiction. A lack of law enforcement resources is a key limitation to successful firearm surrender implementation.

⁶¹ Specific details of the survey findings can be found in Appendix F.

⁶² 55.6% of law enforcement officers said that staffing limitations was a main reason for delay in METERS entry, 44.4% said that it prevents successful or timely service of TPOs, and 55.6% said that it was one of the biggest barriers to removing firearms.

Advocates

The majority of advocates (75.8%) indicated having a practice of discussing firearm surrender requirements with petitioners, but many would like additional tools to better equip them for these conversations. This is complemented by the majority of survivor-participants indicating an understanding of the process, highlighting the importance of survivor access to advocacy services.

Advocates reported that judges were more likely to discuss firearm removal at the FPO stage than the TPO stage; only 27% reported the experience of observing judges discuss firearm removal at the TPO stage “always” or “often,” compared to 66% at the final PO hearing.⁶³ This illuminates a significant gap. Since firearm removal is discretionary at the TPO stage, some judges are not considering this an integral form of available relief. The sentiment among advocates is that judges address firearms in a mostly perfunctory manner. Furthermore, 36.4% of advocates say firearm-related PO violations have generally not been prosecuted; 48.5% are unsure — suggesting that prosecutorial enforcement of firearm provisions is not routine. Lastly, 72.7% of advocates say survivors fear that the respondent will keep firearms after being ordered to surrender them — showing a distrust in the efficacy of the legal system.

Court Stakeholders

Similar to advocates’ observations of court practices, survey responses from court personnel revealed inconsistencies in judicial practices surrounding firearm surrender. Court stakeholders highlighted the need for improved court forms to verify surrender: 43% of court actors say current PO forms do not effectively support identifying firearms. Furthermore, 57% of court actors reported language access needs create challenges at least “sometimes” in ensuring respondents understand surrender requirements. Most concerning, overwhelmingly, court actors did not believe that the current court process supports confirming firearm removal, with only 21.4% of participants believing that the process functions “somewhat” or “very” well. However, they did agree on what should change — 92.9% of court actors favored judges asking about firearms at both hearings, requiring the respondent to list firearms owned, requiring a receipt when firearms are surrendered, automatically scheduling a compliance hearing when no proof of firearm surrender is provided, reviewing firearm surrender compliance at the FPO stage, and statewide tracking of all firearm surrender and removal. This staggering agreement among court actors throughout Maryland highlights the desire to standardize the firearm surrender process.

⁶³ 24.2% of advocates said that judges rarely address firearm removal at the TPO stage but only 6.1% said that judges rarely address firearm removal at the FPO stage.

There are no statutory deadlines for surrender, no consistent verification mechanisms, and no reliable court-based compliance monitoring. If a respondent simply claims to have no firearms — or says they already gave them away — law enforcement has limited recourse.

55.6%

of law enforcement surveyed stated that staffing limitations are one of the biggest barriers to removing firearms

64.3%

of surveyed court actors say courts lack sufficient staff to support firearm-surrender compliance

WHAT ALL STAKEHOLDERS AGREE ON

- Registered-firearm reliance leaves undisclosed and illegal weapons invisible to the process
- Over 90% of advocates and court actors surveyed support mandatory compliance hearings and statewide tracking

DISCONNECTS AND ALIGNMENT ACROSS GROUPS

Where Perspectives Differ

Survivors and advocates shared similar opinions that the current firearm surrender process was not very effective.⁶⁴ Whereas, court actors were nearly evenly split in their determination of effectiveness. Law enforcement was the most optimistic group, with 77.8% believing the process was somewhat effective. Survivors, advocates and court actors expressed an overall lack of confidence in how consistently firearm surrender requirements are being enforced.⁶⁵ Law enforcement officers expressed a bit more confidence in the consistency of firearm surrender enforcement, but no law enforcement officer said they were “very confident.” A possible reason that law enforcement officers have a higher estimation of firearm surrender or removal is that they seek compliance with the firearm prohibition when the court sends them TPOs for service. Whereas, the other actors are more involved in other later stages of the firearm surrender process where there is generally less enforcement.

Where Perspectives Align

All actors noted the need for accountability for when the respondent claims to have no firearms or has illegal or unregistered firearms. Multiple survivors and court actors noted that respondents simply claim they have no firearms, and this is accepted at face value. Court actors and advocates repeatedly flagged that the system relies on registered firearms, leaving undisclosed and illegally-held weapons invisible to the process.

A lack of staffing was an overall concern across differing viewpoints. 64.3% of court actors say courts lack sufficient staff to support firearm surrender compliance. Furthermore, advocates and law enforcement noted that law enforcement is overly burdened and has staffing limitations. This bottleneck affects scheduling, documentation, follow-up, and oversight.

There is near-unanimous stakeholder consensus on solutions.

Over 90% of advocates and court actors support mandatory compliance hearings, statewide firearm tracking, and required firearm disclosure — giving policymakers a rare, clear mandate for reform and the will for implementation on the ground. 75% of survivors, 66.7% of advocates, and 57.1% of court actors support same-day or immediate surrender timelines, which points to a recommendation for Maryland to require law enforcement to collect firearms at the time of TPO service, rather than waiting for a final hearing. If not feasible in all cases, at minimum, a required firearms disclosure form could be collected at service, with clear escalation protocols for noncompliance. There is a critical need for expansion of the statewide firearm surrender tracking system; this was the single most cited structural gap. 55.6% of law enforcement identified it as a technology deficiency; 93.9% of advocates and 92.9% of court actors say Maryland should create a tracking system, highlighting a lack of knowledge and utilization of the current firearm surrender tracking ability. The survey results support the notion that, without universal tracking and reporting, knowledge of what firearms were actually surrendered is limited.

⁶⁴ 28.6% of survivors say “not at all” effective; 35.7% are “not sure” — reflecting lived uncertainty and fear. Advocates corroborate these opinions and at 69.7% say “not very” or “not at all” effective.

⁶⁵ Participants who said they are “not very” or “not at all” confident in how consistently firearm surrender requirements are enforced: 57.1% of survivors, 69.7% of advocates, 64.3% of court actors, and 44.4% of law enforcement.



Lived Experience Findings

Lived Experience Findings

SURVIVOR (PETITIONER) EXPERIENCES

The survivor/petitioner experiences were gleaned from the three survivors who attended the virtual listening sessions and the 18 petitioners, from 11 different counties and Baltimore City, who responded to the survey. Perspectives varied but there were some common threads:

Knowledge of the Court Process

Perceived knowledge of the court process was mixed when comparing survivors' experiences described during the listening session with those who participated in the survey. During the listening session, survivors shared that they had a hard time understanding the entire DVPO process as well as navigating a system that they did not trust. They were unsure how exactly the courts were going to protect them from firearms and how exactly it was going to be included in the DVPO. 88.3% of petitioner survey participants indicated that they understood at least "parts" of the TPO process, and 75.1% indicated that they at least understood "parts" of the FPO process. Notably, 55.6% of survey participants indicated that they received help in filling out the petition forms and 68.8% had an attorney represent them at the final hearing⁶⁶—highlighting the efficacy of advocacy and the benefits of civil legal assistance in DVPO matters. However, 22.2% of survey participants who did not raise concerns about firearms during their petition or TPO process attributed that to a lack of knowledge that they could raise those concerns. It is clear from all participants that there is a lack of understanding of the firearm removal part of the DVPO process.

Fear of Retaliation

Survivor distrust of the legal system commonly contributed to fear of retaliation from their abuser, demonstrating survivors' lack of confidence in the legal systems' ability to promote safety. A survivor stated that once she shared knowledge of the existence of the firearm, she was terrified about how the firearm was going to be removed and retaliation from her abuser because of her disclosure. Additionally, petitioners expressed fear when wanting to disclose the presence of firearms in the presence of the respondent at the

⁶⁶ It should be noted that, potentially due to outreach efforts through community partners like CLS, HOR, and MNADV, the percentage of survivors who were represented in our survey is far larger than statewide data of those represented at the DVPO hearing. For example, in January 2026, in 8.5% of DVPO cases both parties were represented and in 17.8% of DVPO cases only the Petitioner was represented. State of Maryland, Administrative Office of the Courts, (2026, January). Domestic violence monthly summary reporting. https://www.mdcourts.gov/data/dv/DVCR_Statewide_2026_1.pdf.

FPO hearing. Moreover, 22.2% of survey participants who did not raise concerns about firearms during the petition or TPO process attributed it to concerns about retaliation.

Lack of Communication of the Outcome of Service and Firearm Surrender

There was very little help, support, or knowledge as to how the DVPO was going to be served and what the follow-through would be. Based on survey responses, 62.5% of survivors were never informed whether the respondent surrendered firearms, and only 50% were notified when the respondent was even served — leaving victims uninformed during the most dangerous window. The lack of clarity in communication and knowledge of the process made the survivors hesitate to use the process, even when safety was the paramount concern.

Lack of Knowledge on the Intersection of Extreme Risk Protective Orders (ERPOs) and DVPOs

There is a clear lack of understanding of the ERPO process as 50% of survivors had never heard of ERPOs before taking the survey, and only 21.4% had sought one — despite the fact that, among this survivor sample, 78% of respondents had access to firearms when the survivor filed for the DVPO.

Need for Action

Survivors expressed a profound understanding that without consistent and uniform enforcement of firearm surrender, the protective order is “just a sheet of paper.” Survivors wanted same-day firearm removal, verification that all firearms were surrendered, and victim-centered court and law-enforcement based enforcement.

RESPONDENT PERSPECTIVES

The respondent perspectives were gleaned from two survey responses and one interview. A suggestion was made to clarify procedures for firearm surrender using a simple list of instructions. Respondents indicated that they “mostly” or “did not” understand the TPO and what it required of them. A concern was raised that it was unclear how firearms could be surrendered if the respondent was incarcerated at the time of service of the protective order. A suggestion was also made to have correspondence from the court when the protective order expired that detailed what actions were permissible and what actions were still not permissible. Furthermore, it was noted that sometimes there are layers of restrictions on respondents, especially when there are pending criminal charges, which can create confusion. For example, probation restrictions may also include a provision that the victim cannot be contacted and that a defendant cannot possess firearms. Overall, the limited respondents that we heard from wanted clearer guidance on complying with these court orders.



Key Findings

(Integrated Analysis)

Key Findings

(Integrated Analysis)

SYSTEM STRENGTHS

Dedicated and proactive agencies. Law enforcement agencies in several counties that serve protective orders engage in effective practices to obtain information about firearm access by respondents and to ensure relinquishment of firearms. Many agencies implement established protocols that direct officers to take specific steps related to firearms as part of the service process and beyond, including addressing when to seek search warrants to secure firearms. Such protocols can also include directives for officers responding to the scene of a domestic violence incident about how to address any firearms used in the incident or accessible to the perpetrator. These protocols facilitate training and accountability for officers.

Early effectiveness of TPOs. Consistent with implementation research described previously, when firearm relinquishment is ordered at the TPO stage and proactive service strategies are implemented, compliance tends to be relatively strong in Maryland. In fact, to the extent that firearms are obtained by law enforcement, it typically is at the TPO stage of the process. Extensive research demonstrates that the risk of domestic violence homicide increases markedly when and after a survivor takes steps to separate from the perpetrator (sometimes called “separation abuse”). Consequently, the early effectiveness of TPOs may be a life-saving feature of existing practices in some counties, practices that should be adopted statewide based on the existing models being implemented under Maryland’s existing legal framework.

Strong survivor advocacy. Participants in the listening sessions consistently highlighted the effectiveness of advocates throughout the state. The sessions revealed the critical role advocates play in helping survivors navigate the protective order process, complete petitions accurately, attend hearings, receive notice regarding service outcomes, and understand safety planning options. In addition to this work with individual survivors, advocates throughout the state are engaged in systems advocacy, working collaboratively with partners to create positive change in the overall DVPO process and how it responds to firearms.

Early firearm risk identification. A consistent strength across jurisdictions is through law enforcement response and early identification of firearm risk through the LAP. As noted previously, some responding agencies have domestic violence protocols in place that direct officers to take specific actions at the scene, including evaluating firearms risk. These provide a foundation for universal adoption of such protocols. Some advocacy organizations participating in LAP implementation in their communities reported that they are equipped to safety plan and help survivors make informed decisions about whether/how to address firearms risk in their situation, including through a DVPO.

Strong cross-sector collaboration. Participants from several counties detailed the critical partnerships they developed across courts, law enforcement, and community organizations. These collaborations improve survivors' access to services and system navigation, and provide a forum for identification and problem-solving of system challenges. Models like Family Justice Centers (of which there are three in Maryland) enhance access to wraparound services by bringing law enforcement, prosecution, and community organizations together in one location providing survivors with easy access to holistic support and services.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Proactive risk identification. Several sheriff's departments that serve protective orders consistently gather risk information from court records and the petitioner, including asking about firearm access. Several sheriff's offices have a practice of either interviewing the petitioner in person (at the court or family justice center) or conducting a follow-up phone call with the petitioner regarding service. During this conversation, the sheriff's office gathers information regarding the best ways to effectuate service as well as risk information that is relevant to the petitioner's safety but also the sheriff officer's safety. Furthermore, several agencies voluntarily contact the Maryland Gun Center prior to serving a TPO for a full list of guns registered to the respondent. Law enforcement can use this list of guns as a checklist to ensure that all known firearms are accounted for. The Maryland Gun Center also provides records on the respondent to inform the officers if the respondent is otherwise prohibited from possessing firearms pursuant to state or federal law. Furthermore, once firearms are received from the respondent, these sheriff's offices report the number and type of firearms surrendered back to the Maryland Gun Center. These established protocols support safer service and more complete firearm recovery.

Early intervention. Firearm recovery is most effective at the TPO stage. Early intervention increases compliance and reduces risk. DVPOs are often filed when a survivor first separates from an abuser. The time immediately following separation is known to have an increased risk of lethality. However, this firearm recovery is only available if the court orders firearm removal at the TPO stage (which is discretionary); and the respondent voluntarily relinquishes the firearm; or law enforcement has a legal basis to remove the firearm. While many law enforcement agencies spoke about their ability to obtain search warrants to recover firearms when necessary, this still primarily occurred at the TPO stage.

ERPO integration. ERPOs provide an effective tool for immediate firearm removal. As such, obtaining an ERPO in addition to a DVPO is an approach preferred by some survivors whose safety assessment requires that they have the assurance of firearm surrender compliance that is not currently afforded by the DVPO process. Replicating the strengths in ERPO practices into DVPO workflows can further strengthen the system. For example, firearm removal is mandatory at the interim and temporary ERPO stage and compliance mechanisms are very clear for when a final ERPO is issued.

Advocacy support. Some jurisdictions have robust advocacy including civil legal assistance. This includes advocacy at domestic violence agencies as well as victim-witness specialists in police departments and prosecutor's offices. Advocacy improves survivor outcomes by supporting petition filing and requests for firearm prohibition, court navigation, and ongoing safety planning.

KEY CHALLENGES

ENFORCEMENT & COMPLIANCE GAPS

Lack of consistent deadlines. The statutes that prohibit firearm surrender do not set any deadlines for when that surrender must be effectuated. For TPOs that include firearm relinquishment provisions, ideally all firearms in the respondent's possession would be turned over to the serving officers upon service of the TPO. This should include firearms of which they have "constructive possession": firearms which are not in their physical possession but over which they can exercise control and thus have legal possession. In many cases, however, the respondent states that firearms covered by the order are not within their immediate possession. Absent clear deadlines to relinquish such firearms, it is never clear when firearm possession becomes a violation of the order and has criminal ramifications. This may also provide a disincentive for law enforcement to further investigate or take steps to obtain the firearms, and there is no accountability for failure to relinquish. For FPOs, logically, the respondent needs time to go home from the courthouse, get the firearms, and turn them over to law enforcement. Again, there is no clear deadline and the same challenges arise as in the TPO context. Overall, jurisdictions currently vary widely in expectations for relinquishment, creating uncertainty and uneven enforcement. Notably, Maryland's neighbors, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Virginia, all delineate that the respondent has 24 hours to surrender firearms to law enforcement.⁶⁹

Inconsistent judicial practices. Judges are inconsistent in asking about firearms use and access by respondents at both the TPO and FPO stages. Judges vary in including firearms restrictions and relinquishment in TPOs due to their discretionary nature. In some counties, such provisions are non-existent or very rare, while in others there appears to be more regular inclusion of firearm restrictions in TPOs. Furthermore, judges are inconsistent in providing oral judicial notice to the respondent that firearm possession is prohibited when granting an FPO and in providing guidance regarding the respondent's responsibilities and how to go about relinquishing firearms.⁷⁰

Lack of universal compliance monitoring. Compliance monitoring is very limited throughout Maryland. Some judges inform respondents of their obligation to relinquish firearms and how to do so. Some sheriff's offices require that the respondent submit an affidavit/declaration stating if they have no firearms or if they gave firearms to another person. These compliance practices are inconsistently used. Furthermore,

⁶⁹ Del. Code Ann. tit. 10 § 1045(g); 23 Pa. Cons. Stat § 6108(a)(7); Va. Code § 18.2-308.1:4(C).

⁷⁰ To be eligible for Violence Against Women (VAWA) STOP funds, Maryland must certify that that "its judicial administrative policies and practices include notification to domestic violence offenders of the requirements delineated in section 922(g)(8) and (g)(9) of Title 18, United States Code, and any applicable related Federal, State, or local laws[.]" 34 U.S.C. § 10449(e)(1)(A).

if the respondent fails to surrender firearms, or submit an affidavit that the respondent does not possess firearms, most jurisdictions have little recourse. Consequently, the firearms relinquishment process in Maryland was characterized by some listening session participants as an “honor system.”

Variation in practices across jurisdictions. Across counties and regions of Maryland, significant variation exists in how firearm access is addressed in the DVPO process. Of course, such variation is to be expected and can be quite appropriate when effective practices are adapted and tailored to the unique circumstances of a county or region. But much of the variation that became evident during the assessment relates to the non-adoption of promising practices and key strengths previously identified that are being implemented with excellence by some counties. The most important of these practices, which should be more widespread and could be promoted by peer-to-peer collaboration between counties, include: implementation of standardized protocols regarding firearms in domestic violence cases; pre-service of process petitioner interviews and information gathering regarding risk and firearms access; and safe and effective firearm return procedures. Overall, participants in the listening sessions reported that processes vary greatly across jurisdictions, resulting in inconsistent experiences for survivors and uneven accountability for respondents.

SERVICE OF PROCESS & OPERATIONAL BARRIERS

Inconsistent Service of Process Practices. High rates of respondent evasion and resource limitations impede effective service; alternative service methods such as those used in civil cases should be explored. In addition, the listening sessions made evident that staffing shortages and resource constraints contribute significantly to service challenges in many counties, indicating the need for creative solutions.

System response declines after order issuance. As described above, the DVPO process’s response to firearms is strongest in early stages (post-TPO issuance, during service of process and follow-up in some counties). Unfortunately, at the FPO stage, enforcement, service, surrender, and compliance verification are consistently weaker. A key contributing factor appears to be that service of FPOs is either done by in open court or by mail. Law enforcement is typically only involved at the FPO stage if they receive a call for service related to the FPO from a petitioner or their advocate to elicit their assistance. Similarly, if a petitioner receives an IPO (which statutorily cannot include a firearm restriction), and service of the TPO (which may include a firearm restriction) is made by mail or in court at the hearing, law enforcement is not involved at this stage to follow up on firearm surrender.

DATA & TECHNOLOGY GAPS

Fragmented data and communication systems. Many jurisdictions reported that how DVPO information moves between systems and system actors is predominantly manual and paper-based. This focus on manual and paper-heavy communication begins at the start of the DVPO process. Maryland law authorizes electronic filing for protective orders, but only from certain authorized places such as a hospital or domestic violence agency. The majority of survivors are filing for a protective order in-person at the courthouse. Once a TPO is granted, most sheriff’s offices pick up the paperwork to be served on the respondent in-

person. Some departments do this daily, whereas in rural areas the clerk's office may call the department on a per-case basis to inform them that a TPO needs to be picked up and served. Then the sheriff's offices manually enter all TPO information into the Maryland Electronic Telecommunications Resource System (METERS), which then feeds into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Some sheriff's offices need to consult with the petitioner to verify information or gather missing information. They manually update this information in METERS when service of process occurs. They also usually manually file the return of service form at the courthouse as proof of service. This manual transfer and duplicative entry of DVPO information slows processes and increase the risk of missing information and errors.

Limited data collection and reporting. Maryland courts report significant data on protective orders. This data is compiled into monthly reports that include data points such as number of petitions dismissed or denied, the number of FPOs granted, and the type of relief granted in those final orders. However, there is a lack of data on the number of petitions that request firearm-related relief, the number of TPOs that contain firearm-related relief, compliance rates for firearm-surrender at both the TPO and FPO stages, numbers of search warrants issued to enforce firearm prohibitions, and the total number of firearms removed at the TPO and FPO stages.

Varied Use of Maryland's Centralized Tracking of Firearm Surrender/Removal. Recent legislation requires that law enforcement contact the Maryland Gun Center when firearms are surrendered or removed at the FPO stage. In practice, unfortunately, there are key gaps in tracking firearm surrender with this legislation. First, the vast majority of firearm surrenders and removals occur at the TPO stage.⁷¹ Yet there is no requirement that these firearms be reported to the Gun Center. Many agencies are contacting the Gun Center as a matter of course under their own policies prior to removing firearms at the TPO stage. Second, any information reported to the Gun Center is not required to be reported to the petitioner or the court. Third, the Gun Center does not publicly report any information regarding firearm surrender.

RESPONDENT RIGHTS GAPS

Lack of clear instructions on how to surrender firearms. When law enforcement serves a TPO that includes a firearm prohibition, they generally explain that the respondent is prohibited from possessing firearms. However, if firearms were not surrendered at the TPO stage, respondents may get oral notice from the court at the FPO hearing that they are prohibited from possessing firearms. If the FPO is entered by default and the respondent is served by mail, the FPO itself contains a notice of the firearm prohibition. In these cases, the respondent does not obtain information on the steps to lawfully surrender firearms since law enforcement is not involved. A similar situation exists when an IPO is personally served, and a TPO is served in open court or by mail. This information is crucial as it could create a safety risk for the respondent to show up, unannounced at a police department carrying guns despite the best of intentions to surrender them in compliance with the court's order. Furthermore, a copy of a protective order is only mailed or given

⁷¹ Md. Code Ann., Pub. Safety § 5-802(a)(2).

to the respondent in English. If the respondent has limited English proficiency, the respondent will have no actual knowledge of the prohibition. While legally this lack of notice is not a defense to criminal prosecution for violating the firearm prohibition, policies and procedures that encourage compliance would prevent future crimes and enhance survivor safety.

SURVIVOR SAFETY, EQUITY, AND ACCESS GAPS

Limited electronic filing for DVPO petitions. Electronic filing of petitions for DVPOs is used sparingly, typically limited to hospital and family justice center settings.⁷² Many jurisdictions do not utilize electronic filing at all. Electronic filing could be a benefit to survivors, especially in rural jurisdictions, by decreasing the need for long-distance travel. It also gives survivors more autonomy over the process — allowing them to file on their own time, without needing to take time off work or arrange childcare. Furthermore, electronic filing benefits survivors with disabilities, as they can file from their home or other familiar, accessible places. E-filing could also benefit survivors who do not feel comfortable entering a courthouse or other government building, including immigrants and survivors who have experienced discrimination or mistreatment within the justice

Reduced language access outside the courtroom. While language interpretation is generally available at hearings, language access gaps persist during petition filing and in access to translated forms and multilingual resources. Furthermore, court forms are not adjusted for varied literacy levels. There is a critical gap in legal services for in-court representation in protective order cases, particularly for those in the middle-income range who don't qualify for free services but cannot afford private attorneys. Furthermore, while many jurisdictions have passionate court advocates, not every survivor may be able to meet with an advocate before filing the protective order or during the filing process. Simple forms and explanations about the court process that are available in many languages and for a lay reader are essential to bridging this justice gap.

Lack of clarification of the intersection of ERPOs and DVPOs. Participants noted that ERPOs are often viewed as more effective for immediate firearm removal, whereas DVPO firearm surrender typically occurs later in the process since removal is only at the TPO stage, not the IPO stage. Survivors may prefer DVPOs for broader relief (e.g., custody or stay-away provisions) and ERPOs should not be used due to a lack of enforcement of DVPOs. However, there are situations in which a survivor may benefit from an ERPO on its own, or in conjunction with a DVPO. Feedback from the convening highlighted the need for clearer guidance on how these different protective orders interact.

Unreliable notice and communication systems. The current system has significant gaps in providing timely victim notification, which puts the onus on the petitioner to determine the status of service of process and firearm surrender. Participants reported varied experiences with the reliability and accessibility of VINELink⁷³ notifications to petitioners of completed service of process. The authors were unable to

⁷² Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-505.1(b).

⁷³ VINE. (n.d.). Welcome to Maryland VINE. Retrieved June 22, 2026, from <https://vinelink.vineapps.com/state/MD/ENGLISH>; Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy. (n.d.). Victim information and notification everyday (VINE). Retrieved June 22, 2026, from <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/victim-services/rights-resources/vine/>.

determine the root cause of VINELink being considered reliable in some jurisdictions and unreliable in others. One potential cause may be that the manual nature of data entry causes delays in communication. In jurisdictions where VINELink was considered unreliable, advocates and civil attorneys encourage the petitioners to contact the court or law enforcement for status on whether service of process was successful. There is no requirement to notify the for petitioner of firearm surrender. Therefore, it is up to either the police of individual sheriff's offices to provide that information, or the petitioner to contact the sheriff's office for a status update. Not only is the period between filing of a DVPO and service of process dangerous, it is also a period of uncertainty for the petitioner. Timely notification of service of process and firearm surrender would help ease this burden.

Inconsistent granting of ancillary relief in TPO and FPOs. Service providers reported that judges were inconsistent in granting ancillary relief such as child custody and economic relief. To survivors, basic needs like housing, financial security, and child custody typically take priority over addressing firearm concerns. Furthermore, cultural and immigration concerns may prevent the petitioner from raising firearm fears. Judicial consistency in granting ancillary relief and inquiring about firearms could decrease these barriers.

CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES

Reliance on individuals over systems and the critical role of advocacy. The system depends heavily on individual effort and informal coordination rather than standardized processes, resulting in variability across jurisdictions. Advocates and civil attorneys consistently bridge gaps that the formal system does not address, underscoring the need to fund and expand supportive services. Survivors often bear responsibility for navigating the system and monitoring compliance in the absence of coordinated follow-up mechanisms.

Resource and operational capacity constraints. Agencies and courts are stretched thin, particularly regarding service of process and compliance monitoring. Tensions exist between best practices of firearm surrender and removal and the resources required to implement those strategies.

ELEVATED-RISK FAILURE POINTS

Delays in service of DVPOs. Many jurisdictions reported that while law enforcement departments and sheriff offices use their best efforts to serve respondents, there can be significant delays in serving protective orders. Some sheriff's offices have dedicated units that serve DVPOs, while other agencies use patrol officers who make an attempt to serve during their patrol shift. This is evidenced by many TPO hearings being continued due to lack of service. The legislative change lengthening the duration of the TPO may alleviate some of these challenges. However, other root causes will remain such as competing calls for service, high caseload volumes, limited overtime funding, and rural geography, all of which were cited by law enforcement as causes of service delays.

Lack of post-order follow-up. Once a protective order is served, law enforcement have limited remedies if the respondent states simply—“I don’t own any firearms” or “I gave my firearms to so-and-so.” Some law enforcement agencies have created workarounds for these situations such as requiring the respondent to sign an affidavit stating that they don’t own firearms or who they gave the firearms to. Some agencies also reported following up with the person who allegedly received the firearms and conducting an inventory of them. Some agencies consult with the Maryland Gun Center to determine whether the respondent owns registered firearms and will use that list as an inventory when attempting to retrieve firearms from the respondent. However, these law enforcement policies are not consistent throughout Maryland, leaving some law enforcement officers to express frustration that firearm surrender is akin to an “honor system.” If the respondent simply states that they don’t have firearms (without any verification or accountability) and that suffices as compliance, then survivors remain vulnerable and at increased risk.

Court-to-law enforcement transition breakdowns. If firearms are turned over or seized by law enforcement, that information may be given to the Maryland Gun Center; however, we heard very little about that information being returned to the court. In essence, the court does not know if the respondent is complying with their order. We heard from law enforcement that they would appreciate the return of service form including this information.

Default orders without compliance verification. If an IPO is served, service of a TPO can be done in court or by mail if the respondent fails to attend the hearing.⁷⁴ Similarly, if the TPO is served, service of the FPO can be done in court or by mail if the respondent fails to attend the hearing.⁷⁵ However, IPOs do not require firearm surrender. Furthermore, in TPOs the firearm prohibition is discretionary. Therefore, if an IPO or a TPO that does not contain a firearm prohibition is served on the respondent and the respondent does not go to court for the hearing, that respondent is served with the FPO by mail and law enforcement is not tasked with seeking surrender of any firearms. Service by mail may be appropriate in many cases; however, if the respondent has firearms, this is a key gap in the process.

Illegal and unregistered firearms. Ghost guns and unregistered weapons remain a major safety concern due to the absence of reliable tracking mechanisms. Those agencies that use the Maryland Gun Center before serving TPOs requiring firearm surrender obtain a list of all registered firearms that the respondent owns. However, Maryland law does not require registration of all firearms. Furthermore, firearms purchased or obtained illegally and ghost guns are inherently not trackable. This creates safety risks for law enforcement serving the order because they cannot appropriately assess the risk that a particular respondent poses if they don’t have full knowledge of the firearms possessed. Moreover, law enforcement have no way to determine if the respondent has turned over all of the weapons that the respondent possesses and must take the respondent at their word. For survivors, it may create a false sense of relief, or misinformed safety plans, that the respondent no longer has access to firearms.

⁷⁴ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-505(b)(2).

⁷⁵ Md. Code Ann., Family Law § 4-506(b)(2).



Strategic Recommendations

Strategic Recommendations

The information obtained through the listening sessions, mapping sessions, interviews, surveys, and the statewide in-person convening provide a number of specific opportunities for improvement to Maryland's DVPO and firearm surrender processes that will result in enhanced survivor and public safety, ensure fairness to all parties in the DVPO process, and give full effect to judicial orders.

STANDARDIZATION

Survivor and public safety, and procedural fairness, are most effectively enhanced with the use of proven and consistent firearm surrender standards. A standard applicable to, and sufficiently malleable to be implemented by, Maryland's 23 counties and Baltimore City is essential. Components of such a standardized practice should feature:

- A formalized inquiry into respondent firearm access, including (but not solely reliant upon) information provided by the survivor;
- A standard practice of pre-DVPO service interviews with the petitioner, coupled with additional information gathering;
- Consistent standards for including firearm prohibition and surrender provisions in TPOs;
- Clear and enforceable firearm surrender orders with a specific compliance deadline;
- Clearly established procedures for respondents to surrender their firearms;
- Verbal and written advisement of respondents as to their surrender obligations and procedures for doing so, provided in easily understood terms and available in languages that reflect the community makeup;
- Unambiguous obligations for respondents to establish their compliance, such as the use of standardized form affidavits filed with law enforcement and/or the court, and sufficient and clear notice of said obligations and the timeframe for such;
- Available mechanisms for law enforcement to compel compliance with firearm surrender orders;
- A reliable method of providing notice to petitioners as to service of process and surrender compliance updates; and
- Consistent integration of advocacy services for the survivor.

ACCOUNTABILITY & COMPLIANCE

Authority to prohibit access to firearms within DVPOs is informed by homicide and injury data and the experiences of survivors. These provisions are ill-equipped to enhance survivor safety when there is a lack of compliance and enforcement. Prohibition and surrender orders without clear timeframes for compliance and a process to do so hinder the ability of law enforcement and courts to enforce the orders, which compromises survivor safety. Overall, compliance with firearm surrender obligations must shift away from voluntary compliance and towards court-based enforcement. To enable this, reliable and consistent processes to surrender and demonstrate compliance must be available. Accountability and compliance can be promoted in a few ways:

Clear compliance deadlines. The firearm prohibition and surrender order must indicate a clear deadline for compliance. Otherwise, it is unclear when non-compliance begins and obscures law enforcement and court authority to compel compliance. These deadlines should also account for situations in which a respondent is served with a DVPO in jail.

Verified compliance. Compliance should require documentation, under oath, through which the respondent attests that, as of the clearly communicated compliance deadline, they lack access to firearms. Where compliance was met by surrendering firearms, such documentation should require itemized confirmation from the law enforcement official who received the firearms from the respondent. This compliance documentation should be returnable to the court.⁷⁶ Furthermore, if the respondent states that they gave firearms to a third party, that third party should produce a receipt stating what firearms were received law enforcement should confirm that the third party is not prohibited from possessing firearms by state or federal law.

Actionable steps upon non-compliance. Compliance dates should be monitored by the court. Non-compliance should activate both enforcement, such as seizure orders or warrants to be executed by law enforcement, and accountability, such as contempt liability for non-compliance.

Reimagine a centralized compliance tracking system. The infrastructure for a centralized hub of information relevant to firearm surrender compliance exists in Maryland through the Maryland Gun Center. Reimagining the procedures for reporting into and accessing the information would advance progress throughout the state in establishing consistent firearm surrender enforcement and would promote survivor and officer safety. Measures that would support this include shifting reports to the Maryland Gun

⁷⁶ For more information on respondent verification forms see National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms. (2021). Implementing an effective firearm relinquishment protocol. Battered Women's Justice Project. https://bwjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Firearms_Report.pdf.

Center at the TPO stage from voluntary to mandatory and enabling the Maryland Gun Center to facilitate communication of data between law enforcement and courts in real time.

Fortunately, there are in-state models readily available for standardization and adoption broadly across the state.

TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

The DVPO firearm surrender processes and compliance would be greatly enhanced by modernizing data systems to enable real-time information flow and investing resources in data collection and tracking integrated across agencies.

Modernize data systems and infrastructure by replacing outdated databases and implementing real-time electronic transmission. National promising practices include using e-filing for petitions (even at the courthouse), electronic court-to-law enforcement transmission of the PO forms and the PO data to reduce duplicative entries, and e-filing (using a tablet or laptop in police cruisers) for law enforcement of the return of service of process.

Expand electronic court-to-law enforcement systems. Enabling courts and law enforcement agencies to electronically share information in real time will significantly increase safety. Current processes involving paper handoffs between courts and law enforcement agencies extend the critical period between the issuance of an order and its service, thereby delaying firearm surrender. This is a vulnerable period for survivor safety and lessening the window will meaningfully improve outcomes. Furthermore, it will decrease the necessity for law enforcement to manually re-enter the basic DVPO information, causing less strain on law enforcement resources.

Increase the ability to track and analyze data across agencies and systems. Instituting a comprehensive tracking of system performance and outcomes by including cross-agency data on the issuance, service, compliance, and accountability of DVPOs would enable identification of opportunities for system improvement more quickly and efficiently. Survey responses were very clear across all participants that firearm surrender tracking needs to be expanded. Furthermore, stakeholders are interested in this data and want access to aggregate data. This should be complemented by routine observation and analysis of the data by all system stakeholders to achieve greatest impact. [The Maryland Firearm Violence Data Dashboard](#) provides a ready vehicle for integrating DVPO firearm surrender data in a manner protective of confidentiality obligations. The availability of integrated data across multiple agencies allows for comprehensive observation and analysis of systems and responses to intimate partner related gun violence.

WORKFORCE & CAPACITY

Workforce and logistical concerns pose tangible barriers to consistent enforcement of DVPO firearm surrender processes. There are concrete actions that can be taken in Maryland and opportunities to innovate practices to lessen these barriers.

Define and build operational capacity. Clearly delineate roles and responsibilities within law enforcement agencies and courts to ensure safe and timely service of DVPOs and consistent application of firearm surrender compliance procedures. Law enforcement and courts should evaluate which roles require sworn law enforcement officers to perform specific duties and which duties can be performed by non-law enforcement personnel. For example, many law enforcement agencies are using non-law enforcement personnel to enter protective order information into METERS. Nationally, courts have had success designating a court clerk to oversee compliance efforts.⁷⁷ However, increasing law enforcement staffing so that the dangerous task of removing firearms at a time when a safety risk is the greatest must be a statewide priority.

Expand availability of electronic filing of DVPO petitions. The infrastructure for electronic filing of DVPO petitions is already functional in Maryland. However, its limited applicability to filing from certain locations make this option difficult for many survivors to access. For many survivors, the ability to electronically file removes barriers to engaging with the legal system for these protections. Maryland has this capacity in electronic filing for other types of cases. Maryland should consider working with advocates to expand electronic filing for DVPOs to ensure that in addition to being accessible, the filing process provides survivors with the support they need.

Consider alternative service options. Currently, all DVPOs must be served by law enforcement. Alternative forms of service are not expressly authorized by statute. Many states are exploring alternatives to law enforcement service in protective order matters, such as service by electronic means.⁷⁸ Survey data showed that the majority of advocates believed that alternative service forms would improve service of process.⁷⁹ Most law enforcement agencies reported that evasion of service by respondents remains an impediment that drains law enforcement resources. Survey data also showed that advocates believed prioritizing high-risk cases for faster service was the top method that Maryland could adopt to improve service of POs.⁸⁰ It is worth evaluating whether alternative service could be appropriate in some cases, and whether authority for alternative service may be found in Maryland law, which would allow law enforcement to focus in-person service on the most dangerous cases and those that necessitate firearm surrender.

⁷⁷ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms. (2025, June 11). Community Spotlight: Bexar County, TX. Battered Women's Justice Project. https://nrcdvf.org/community_spotlights/bexar-county-texas/. Center for Justice Innovation. (2025, June 4). St. Louis County domestic violence court [Fact sheet]. Center for Justice Innovation. https://www.innovatingjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CJI_DVMC_FactSheet_StLouis_06042025.pdf.

⁷⁸ Wash. Rev. Code § 7.105.150.

⁷⁹ Alternative service was prioritized by 60.6% of advocates and service on a third party at the respondent's home was prioritized in 54.5% advocates.

⁸⁰ This was prioritized by 78.8% of advocates.

Address operational challenges. Consistent information sharing about outcomes will alleviate some operational challenges. Through a multidisciplinary information-sharing practice, there should be a consensus around which trends require attention and clear assignment of responsibility for identifying and piloting solutions. For example, the proliferation of unregistered and ghost firearms and the complexities of enforcement related to these weapons, inconsistent safe firearm return processes and ensuring routine training on firearm surrender processes for all relevant roles.

Acknowledge and address community-specific barriers and solutions. In particular, increase firearm storage in rural jurisdictions. A common theme in rural jurisdictions was the increased firearm ownership for hunting, but also the decreased ability to store firearms due to storage and resource constraints. This is a barrier not experienced by the larger and more urban jurisdictions. We recommend using a statewide approach to assess storage capacity and to create partnerships between agencies to increase storage capacity in more rural areas. This is another opportunity to streamline ERPO processes with DVPO processes in that the ERPO law has mechanisms for law enforcement to sell or destroy firearms and ammunition in certain situations, such as with the respondent's consent or if the respondent fails to request return of the firearms, which relieves some of the burden to store a portion of surrendered weapons.⁸¹

SURVIVOR-CENTERED IMPROVEMENTS

The legal system is unintuitive and daunting to a non-attorney. That is compounded for survivors by the stress, anxiety, and trauma often associated with seeking legal protections to safeguard their physical and emotional security from an intimate partner. Accessibility of the DVPO system would be enhanced by a few specific efforts:

Scale advocacy. Access to legal and advocacy services lessens the daunting nature of the legal system for survivors. Outcomes improve when survivors have legal assistance and/or advocacy support: survivors receive accurate information about court processes, which are often confusing; survivors can more clearly and effectively communicate relevant information about safety risk to the court, aiding informed judicial decision-making; and civil legal assistance supports survivor safety during proceedings.

ERPO integration statewide. Due to the inconsistent enforcement of DVPO firearm surrender orders, some survivors are opting to pursue ERPOs instead of, or alongside, DVPOs. Furthermore, we have heard law enforcement speak favorably about the statutory authority within the ERPO law for search warrants; replicating this practice for DVPOs could provide law enforcement with clear guidelines and avoid confusion about the proper responses between DVPOs and ERPOs, such as when to request a search warrant in the absence of voluntary compliance. In addition, interim ERPOs by definition remove firearms, whereas DVPOs cannot. This inconsistency forces a survivor to engage in two different legal processes if protection while the court is closed is needed. Enhancing coordination between DVPO and ERPO implementation statewide will

⁸¹ Md. Code Ann., Pub. Safety § 5-607.

streamline court filings and support survivor safety by reducing the need for navigating dual proceedings to ensure firearm surrender orders are complied with. Established models within the state have promise for scalability statewide. Once the coordination has been established, training for law enforcement, advocates and civil attorneys on the interaction between ERPOs and DVPOs, including when it may be beneficial for law enforcement to seek an ERPO in the DV context would be beneficial.

Provide accessible information about the DVPO and firearm surrender processes. For those survivors who will navigate the legal process alone, forms and informational brochures should be available uniformly at all courthouses across the state, in how to file a DVPO petition; the processes at each stage of the DVPO process, including firearm surrender and compliance; and information on local survivor resources. Similar information should also be available regarding ERPO processes and should include the differences between DVPOs and ERPOs to ensure survivors make an informed choice about which process to navigate.⁸²

Create a victim notification system for firearm removal status. Investing in systems which can provide victims with real time status information about service of their DVPO and compliance, or non-compliance, with firearms surrender provisions would enable survivors to reassess their safety plans with this critical information. Currently, VINELink provides statewide victim notification when service of process of a TPO is complete. It is worthwhile to evaluate the capacity of VINELink to be expanded in Maryland to include victim notifications related to firearms surrender. Regardless of whether VINELink or another notification platform is utilized, domestic violence advocacy agencies should be consulted to ensure that safety precautions are utilized when providing notification and that victim confidentiality is protected in compliance with relevant state and federal laws, including the Violence Against Women Act's confidentiality obligations.⁸³ Any survivor notification system should be widely accessible and broadly advertised, with opt-in/opt-out abilities and accessibility in a range of languages that reflect Maryland's communities. The entry of relevant information into such a system should be as close to real time as practicable.

Enhance the bench's knowledge of domestic violence risk. Seeking and obtaining a DVPO is one aspect of a survivor's overall safety plan. We heard a need for judicial training on the importance of ancillary relief in protective order matters, such as child custody, child support, housing, and financial assistance. These measures, which extend beyond physical safety, are key components that allow survivors to formulate a comprehensive safety plan that lets them then focus specifically on firearm-related safety concerns. Furthermore, judicial training on the importance of notifying respondents of firearm prohibitions can be used as a means of increasing voluntary surrender.⁸⁴

⁸² For a discussion on the differences between ERPOs and DVPOs see National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith & Credit. (2023, July). Extreme risk protection orders vs domestic violence protection orders: What you should know. Battered Women's Justice Project. <https://bwjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/ERPO-vs-DVPO.pdf>.

⁸³ 34 U.S.C. § 12291.

⁸⁴ National Resource Center on Domestic Violence and Firearms & National Center on Protection Orders and Full Faith and Credit. (2025, June 3). Guide to judicial notification. Battered Women's Justice Project. <https://nrcdvf.org/resources/guide-to-judicial-notification/>.

SUSTAINABILITY

Consistent and effective DVPO firearm surrender processes require multiagency coordination across multiple stages. Processes can break down over time with shifting of resources and personnel. To ensure processes are reliable and consistent, it is important to be attentive to institutionalized practices and build sustainability. Several of the above recommendations support sustainable practices:

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- Real-time cross-agency information sharing, particularly between the court and law enforcement;
- Model forms to be utilized across the state;
- Routine training for all stakeholders that is discipline-specific and cross-discipline;
- Centralized data and information available to all stakeholders.

Leveraging proven effective models in-state. There are several models within Maryland that are effective in their communities and scalable statewide. Leaning on these successfully implemented processes and practices for their successful features and lessons learned to promote easy sustainability over time.

Developing communities of practice. Building communities of practice across the state will facilitate sharing of effective practices, emerging issues and solutions, and resources. It would promote regular evaluation of consistency across the state, accountability to processes, and provide stakeholders with peers throughout Maryland with whom they can troubleshoot, share data, and share successes.



Investment Priorities

Investment Priorities

- 1 Scale proven practices**, including early firearm recovery, effective service practices, and advocacy integration.
- 2 Increase workforce capacity** across law enforcement, courts, and advocacy organizations.
- 3 Strengthen accountability systems**, including compliance monitoring and enforcement.
- 4 Expand survivor-centered supports**, including housing, legal services, and language access.
- 5 Make infrastructure investments** in integrated data systems, electronic workflows, and compliance-tracking tools.
- 6 Draw from in-state expertise** and proven effective models.
- 7 Invest in sustainability**, training, forms, centralized information, and information sharing.



Conclusion

Conclusion

Maryland stands at a meaningful inflection point in its commitment to survivor safety. The challenges documented in this assessment — inconsistent enforcement, fragmented communication, and insufficient compliance mechanisms — are real, but not insurmountable. The tools, partnerships, and promising practices needed to build a safer, more equitable system already exist within Maryland’s counties and communities; what is needed now is the collective will to bring them to scale. The solutions outlined in this report offer a clear, achievable path forward: standardized processes that ensure accountability, technology that connects agencies in real time, expanded advocacy that meets survivors where they are, and a legal infrastructure that treats firearm surrender not as an afterthought but as a life-saving intervention. Maryland has the opportunity to model for the nation what it looks like when a state fully commits to keeping firearms out of the hands of those who have caused harm. The courage of the survivors, professionals, and community members who contributed to this assessment points the way to a safer Maryland.



Appendix

GLOSSARY

DVPO

Domestic Violence Protective Order

ERPO

Extreme Risk Protective Order

IPO

Interim Protective Order

LAP

Lethality Assessment Program

MDEC

Maryland Electronic Courts. The Maryland Judiciary's statewide electronic filing and case management system.

METERS

Maryland Electronic Telecommunications Resource System. Maryland's statewide law enforcement network used to transmit criminal justice information and service confirmations.

NCIC

National Crime Information Center. The FBI-managed national database that includes the Protection Order File, allowing nationwide enforcement.

TPO

Temporary Protective Order

SELECTED REFERENCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES

Selected references and technical assistance resources can be found here:

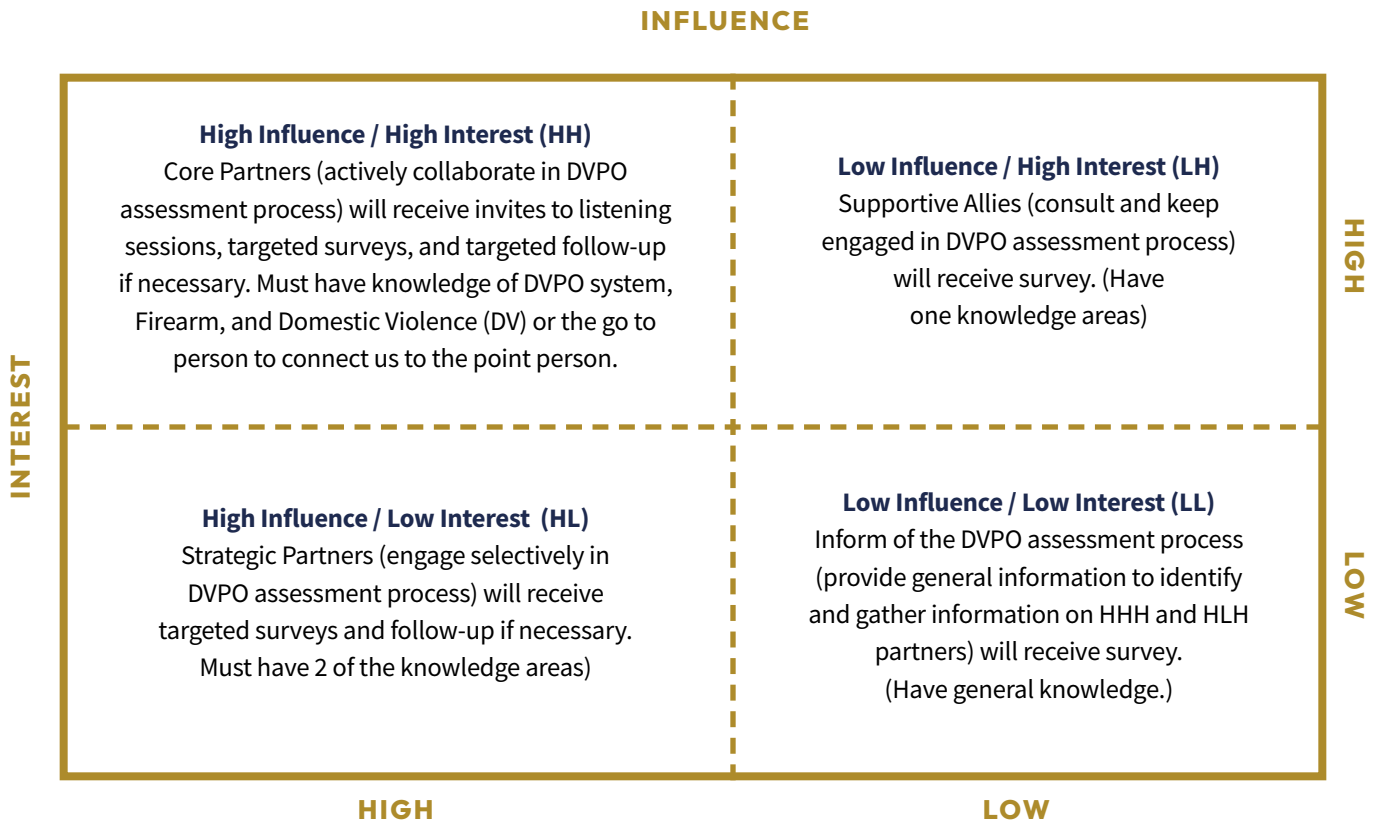
<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/selected-references>

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

The following is a list of categories of potential stakeholders:

- Judge
- Family Justice Center
- Public Defender Association
- Court Case System Manager
- Coordinated Community Response Team
- Public Health Organization
- Court Clerk
- College Campus Program
- Prosecutor
- Civil Attorney
- Probation/Parole
- Government Agency
- Defense Attorney
- DDVSAS Advocate
- City Council
- Bar Association Victim Service Provider
- County Board
- Legal Services Program
- Victim Witness Advocate
- Regional Collaboration/Org
- Law Enforcement Agency
- Coalition/Network
- Advocacy Groups
- Sheriff Office
- Violence Interrupter
- Individual Citizen (not litigant)
- Criminal Justice Information Services System Agency
- Culturally-Specific Service Provider
- Natural Helpers
- Court Technologist
- Faith Based Organization
- Court Personnel
- Abuse Intervention Program

The following is a grid used to categorize stakeholders based on Influence and Interest:



The following is the list of communities that were prioritized for outreach:

- Youth/College aged
- Deaf/hard of hearing community
- non-English speaking/multilingual community
- LGBTQ+ community
- DV Survivors/Petitioners
- DV Respondents
- Military Servicemembers
- People with disabilities
- Underserved/marginalized communities

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Maryland DV Protective Order & Firearm Surrender Needs Assessment Survey Design Instrument:

<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/maryland-dv-protective-order-firearm-surrender-needs-assessment-survey-design-0>

LISTENING SESSION METHODOLOGY

List of Listening Sessions and Number of Attendees:

Date	Region	Attendance
October 31, 2025	Prince George's County	12
January 13, 2026	Baltimore City Listening Session	14
January 15, 2026	Upper and Mid-Eastern Shore Listening Session	1
January 16, 2026	Culturally Specific Provider Organizations	8
January 20, 2026	Central Maryland	21
January 22, 2026	Montgomery County	16
February 17, 2026	Lower Eastern Shore	5
February 19, 2026	Western Maryland	10
March 10, 2026	Southern Maryland	14
March 11, 2026	Frederick County	8
March 16, 2026	Open Listening Session	6
March 18, 2026	Sheriff Departments	9
March 23, 2026	County and Local Police Agencies	19
April 30, 2026	Survivor/Petitioners	3
May 13, 2026	Mid-Eastern Shore	13
May 19, 2026	Respondent Listening Session	1

List of Interviews:

Date	Organization/Topic
November 17, 2025	GOCPP
December 20, 2025	ERPO Process
May 6, 2026	MD Gun Center

DETAILED SURVEY RESULTS

<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/mdh-appendix-survey-results>

LAWS

Summary of the Maryland Legal Landscape of the Civil Protective Order Process

<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/summary-marylands-legal-landscape-civil-protective-order-process>

Maryland Laws Regarding Firearms and Domestic Violence Protective Orders

<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/maryland-laws-regarding-firearms-and-domestic-violence-protective-orders>

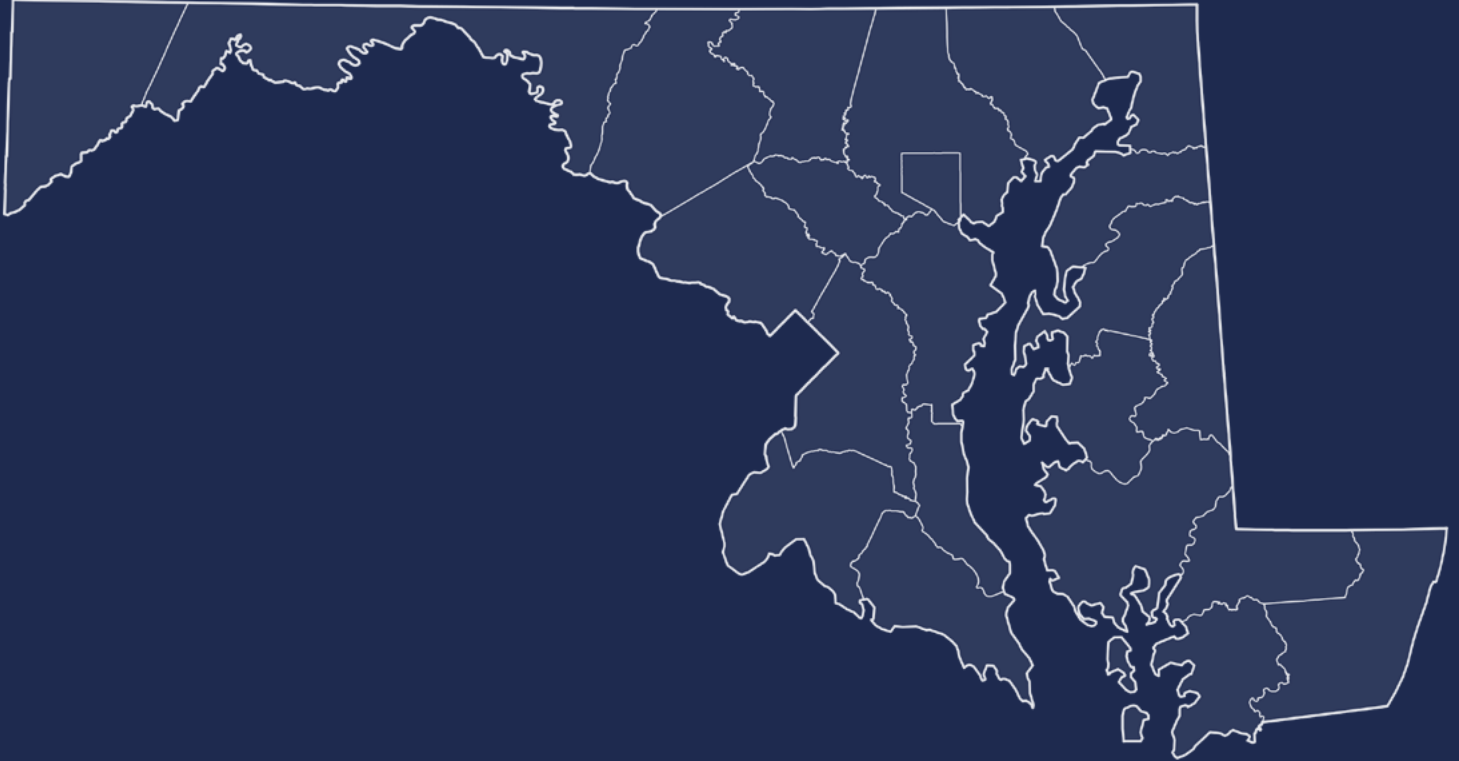
Neighboring States' and D.C.'s Laws on Firearms and Domestic Violence Protective Orders

<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/neighboring-states-and-dcs-laws-firearms-and-domestic-violence-protective-orders>

PROCESS MAP

A graphical depiction of the DVPO process can be found here:

<https://lms.thelearningcommunitytoendviolence.org/resources/maryland-dvpo-firearm-surrender-map>



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