

Beat: Politics

Maryland Governor seeks Strictist Gun-Control Law in the Nation

Opponents outnumber Supporters 40-to-1

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USPA NEWS - A day after the Senate passed one of the strictest pieces of gun control legislation in the nation, Governor Martin O'Malley told the House Judiciary and Health and Government Operations committees that if his bill "saves even one more life, it's as if we've saved the world."

While almost 300 people showed up for a rally Friday morning outside the State House on Lawyers Mall, to support Governor O'Malley's gun control legislation, the opponents were lining up by the thousands to get their name on the list of those wishing to testify against the Governor's proposed legislation.

Opponents of the Governor's far reaching gun control legislation still feeling stung from their defeat in the Senate came out en masse for the House hearing, and outnumbered supporters in Annapolis on Friday by nearly 40-to-1.

At a joint hearing of the House Judiciary and Health and Government Operations committees, which began around 12:00PM and ended just before 4:00AM, over 1300 people had signed up to speak in opposition to the bill while just under 40 were there to express their support.

Governor O'Malley assembled panels composed of a cadre of law enforcement officials and public policy experts to testify in support of his proposed legislation.

Gun Violence in Maryland is a "public health epidemic" said Chief James Johnson of the Baltimore County Police Department as he testified in favor of the bill and urged House lawmakers to keep the strongest restrictions intact.

Delegate John Cluster, Jr., Republican " Baltimore County, questioned a panel of experts who testified in favor of the bill as to the need for an assault weapon ban given that none of the murders in Maryland involved the use of an assault weapon.

Baltimore County State's Attorney Scott Shellenberger responded by asking Delegate Cluster "why would you wait for the first one?"

At the height of the hearing, opponents had filled five overflow rooms in the Lowe House Office Building to capacity. In these rooms they were able to watch the proceedings-taking place in the joint hearing room of the legislative service building via closed circuit television, as they waited for their allotted one-minute to testify before the House panel.

Most of those present felt that the proposed legislation would strip them of their Second Amendment rights. Others urged lawmakers to remove the gun licensing provisions and fingerprinting requirement for new gun owners

Delegate Don Dwyer, R-31-Pasadena, stopped into one of the overflow rooms to thank 2nd Amendment supporters for being there, and to let them know their voice mattered. "I received and delivered to the House Judiciary Committee over 20,000 pages of written testimony from people just like you", Dwyer said to the supportive crowd.

Shannon Alford, Maryland liaison for the National Rifle Association (NRA) said, "It is wrong for the State of Maryland to require a license to exercise a fundamental right."

Governor O'Malley vehemently disagreed with opponents, saying of his bill "it is comprehensive, it is common sense, and it does find common ground that is supported by the vast majority of Marylanders." The governor ended by saying "and it saves lives."

While the most vocal do not always represent the will of the people, Friday's hearing certainly gives Maryland lawmakers a lot to consider. The full House is expected to debate and vote on this legislation by the end of next week.

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