

Bill to bolster security guard oversight in Maryland heads to governor's desk for final approval

By Alex Mann and Darcy Costello
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Most security guards in Maryland now will have to be trained, licensed by the state and covered by insurance, under legislation passed in the final hours of the legislative session Monday night.

As things stand, only guards who work for private security companies in Maryland are required to have licenses issued by state police. If a guard is employed directly by a non-security business, like a grocery store, they don't have a state-issued "guard card." The state **has not require training for guards**, regardless of their employer, and hasn't tracked when they use force against people at work.



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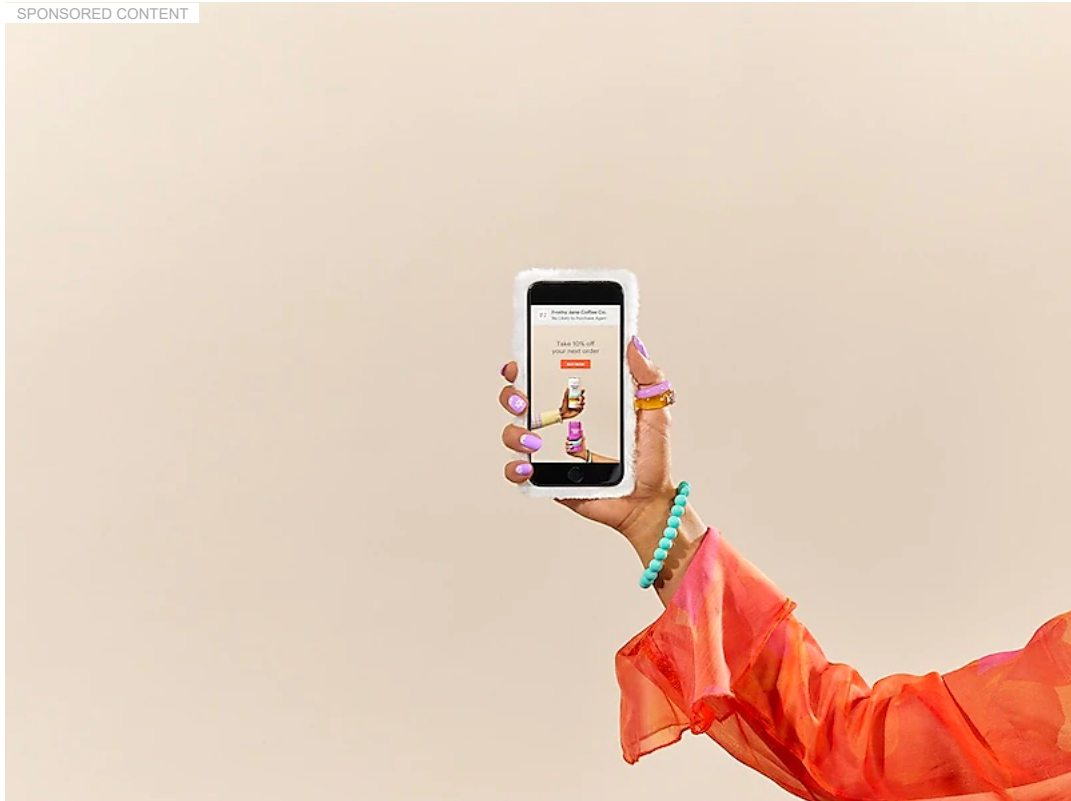
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Sponsored by Sen. Jill Carter, a Democrat from Baltimore, the legislation passed Monday establishes training requirements for private security and mandates guards or their employers report to the state when they **use force**, bringing Maryland closer to having universal standards for people who work in the police-adjacent industry.

Senate Bill 760 now heads to the desk of Democratic Gov. Wes Moore, who can sign the legislation into law, let it go into effect without his signature, or veto it.

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“Long time coming,” said Carter, who introduced similar legislation in 2006, in a text message Tuesday morning.

Although security guards who carry guns have to undergo training to obtain a license to carry those weapons, that curriculum is not specific to guards’ jobs, which regularly put them in contact with people. The legislation outlines training for guards who apply to carry guns and those who don’t. It does not apply to gun-less guards working security at restaurants, bars and taverns — employees commonly called “bouncers.”

Carter’s legislation, and a parallel bill in the House of Delegates sponsored by Baltimore delegates Elizabeth Embry and Marlon Amprey, both Democrats, follows several shootings by guards in the city they all represent. Guards have **fatally shot** at least three people in Baltimore over the past two years. While lawmakers debated the bills’ merits, a **security officer shot a man inside a pizzeria** in Baltimore’s Fells Point neighborhood March 19.

The sponsors have described the legislation as a public safety measure.

“I’m thrilled,” Embry told The Baltimore Sun. “This is a really important step in the right direction.”

The National Association of Security Companies, which represents several private security businesses in Maryland, supported the bill throughout the session.

In a statement after the bill's passage, Steve Amitay, the security organization's executive director, described the legislation as a "big common sense public safety win for Marylanders who interact with security guards every day."

Amitay highlighted bill provisions that require use of force and de-escalation training for all guards and mandate that all guards — not just those working for security companies — undergo FBI fingerprint-based background checks before working.

"With the passage of this bill, Maryland becomes a national leader in standardizing licensing, vetting and training of security guards, which will benefit all Maryland residents," Amitay said.



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If it becomes law, the bill would go into effect June 2024.

In the meantime, Carter and Embry said they'll work with hospitals to allay concerns raised by the health care security industry, which could lead to amendments in the next legislative session.

Troy Blades, chairman of the Maryland Chapter of the International Association of Healthcare Security & Safety, expressed his concerns about the legislation in a March 22 letter to Delegate C.T. Wilson, a Democrat who chairs the House Economic Matters Committee, which eventually approved both versions of the bill.

Blades said that guards who provide security at hospitals and other health care facilities already face oversight from the state and federal government. His letter recommended carving out an exception for guards who work in security at health care facilities akin to that outlined in the legislation for current police officers or those who recently left law enforcement.

Existing regulations for guards in health care, Blades said, include minimum training standards covering such topics as "management of aggressive behaviors, de-escalation techniques, safe physical healthcare interventions and proper uses of force, clinical restraints, working with individuals who are experiencing mental health crisis, severe autism, and brain injury."

Short of exempting health care security altogether, Blades asked lawmakers not to require guards in their industry to report uses of force when doctors or nurses ask guards to intervene in medical situations.

"This bill will place an undue burden on healthcare facilities with regard to reporting as well. A typical healthcare facility can have an average of 500 Code Green combative patient calls annually, which can require a healthcare intervention," Blades wrote.