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**TESTIMONY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND PROGRESS INITIATIVE  
ON FEBRUARY 14, 2024  
BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
REGARDING HOUSE BILL 0583 - CROSS-FILED WITH: SB0475  
CENTER FOR FIREARM VIOLENCE PREVENTION – ESTABLISHMENT**

**SUPPORT**

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger and Vice Chair J. Sandy Bartlett and distinguished members of Judiciary Committee:

The University of Maryland's PROGRESS Initiative provides this testimony in support of House Bill 583 - Center For Firearm Violence Prevention – Establishment, sponsored by Speaker of the House, Adrienne A Jones by request of the Moore Administration and the many Co-sponsor Delegates. Responding to the need address the epidemic of gun violence, this legislation establishes the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention in the Maryland Department of Health to reduce firearm violence, harm from firearm violence, and misuse of firearms. HB583 calls for a public health approach to firearm violence reduction that would emphasize science-informed actions; utilizing data and research to formulate effective strategies and solutions; and coordination between federal, state, and local agencies and authorities including academia, law enforcement, communities and advocates.

Gun violence in America continues to be a tragic and uniquely American epidemic affecting all communities all across our country. Schools, churches, mosques, synagogues, grocery stores, hospitals, malls, entertainment venues, nightclubs, neighborhoods, streets, malls, and homes are not safe places. According to the CDC, there were 48,830 firearm deaths in the US in 2021, amounting to more than 133 fatalities on average every day from homicide, suicide, unintentional injury, and legal intervention.<sup>1</sup> Firearm related morbidity is estimated at 3-5 times the number of deaths with untold human and capital costs.

In Maryland in 2021 there were 915 deaths from firearms with 592 homicides and 310 deaths by suicide.<sup>2</sup> Gun violence is now the leading cause of death for children and youth surpassing motor vehicle deaths and those caused by other injuries in our State. Baltimore and Prince George's County account for 75% of all fatal and nonfatal shootings in the State.

<sup>1</sup> CDC Wisqars On-line Causes of Injury-Related Death Data Base, Violence-related Firearm Deaths; Both Sexes; All Ages; All Races and Ethnicity; US and Maryland; 2021.  
<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/explore/?o=MORT&y1=2021&y2=2021&g=00&g=24&t=0&i=0&m=20890&d=&s=0&r=0&m=0&ry=2&yp=65&e=0&a=ALL&a1=0&a2=199&g1=0&g2=199>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid





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Root factors such as poverty, racism, misinformation, and law enforcement tensions have been inextricably linked to the rising numbers of homicide, suicide, and mass shooting firearm deaths. For decades, gun violence has been the leading cause of death and disability among Black males ages 16-44. It has become the leading cause of death for children and youth in the US, surpassing motor vehicle crash deaths. Gun violence costs Maryland approximately \$10.5 billion annually with Maryland taxpayers bearing an estimated \$384 million.

Preventing the tragic consequences of gun violence in our communities and our nation is among the highest priorities and grand challenges of our time. University of Maryland President Darryll J. Pines has directed action now to “do something” to summon all of our strengths and assets to act for the public’s good and prevent gun violence and save lives. He said, “Effective solutions to grand challenges demands fearless ideas...” and established The University of Maryland Prevent Gun Violence: Research, Empowerment, Strategies and Solutions (PROGRESS) Initiative in November 2023.

The provisions of HB0583 to establish the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention are consonant with and complimentary to PROGRESS. PROGRESS addresses two key pillars of the University of Maryland's strategic plan: to accelerate solutions to humanity’s grand challenges and to advance the public good. Sponsored by the Office of the President and housed within the College of Behavior and Social Science, the mission of PROGRESS is to reduce firearm-related violence using a multi-disciplinary, community-based and translational science public health approach to promote actionable gun violence interventions to promote public safety and enhance the quality of life for the people of Maryland, the National Capital Region, and the nation. UMD President Darryll Pines tasked Joseph Richardson, PhD and Woodie Kessel, MD, MPH with developing, implementing and leading PROGRESS.

HB0583 is also consistent with the recently established White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention responsibilities including enhancing the federal government’s partnerships with cities and states to help them advance their own efforts to reduce gun violence.<sup>3</sup>

In summary, HB0583 offers a comprehensive approach that will enhance the safety of Marylanders aligning with evidence-based practices and addressing critical issues related to the prevention of gun violence employing an important public health approach. PROGRESS urges the committee to produce a favorable report supporting House Bill 0583 (and the cross-filed Senate version SB0475) to build on Maryland’s efforts to prevent the trauma and nightmare of gun violence in our State. Nothing could be more important.

<sup>3</sup> FACT SHEET: Vice President Harris Launches the Biden-Harris Administration Safer States Initiative, Highlights New Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/12/13/fact-sheet-vice-president-harris-launches-the-biden-harris-administration-safer-states-initiative-highlights-new-executive-actions-to-reduce-gun-violence/>



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PROGRESS is a University of Maryland Fearlessly Forward Initiative sponsored by the Office of the President and housed within the College of Behavior and Social Sciences (BSOS).