



**TESTIMONY OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES FORUM: ADVOCACY
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND
ON FEBRUARY 14, 2024,
BEFORE THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 583, REGARDING THE CREATION OF
A CENTER FOR FIREARMS VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger, Vice-Chair Sandy Bartlett, and Members of the Committee:

The Critical Issues Forum: Advocacy for Social Justice (CIF), provides this testimony in support of HB 583, which would establish a Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention within the Maryland Department of Health. We applaud Governor Moore’s initiative to address the staggering toll that gun violence exacts in Maryland through a coordinated public health approach that addresses both the causes and effects of this problem.

CIF is a coalition of three synagogues, Temple Beth Ami, Kol Shalom, and Adat Shalom, that include over 1,750 households and three denominations of Judaism: Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist. CIF serves as a vehicle for our congregations to speak out on policy issues, such as gun violence prevention, that relate to our shared values, including the Jewish traditions that emphasizes the sanctity and primary value of human life.

The severity of Maryland’s gun violence problem is undeniable. According to the most recent statistics compiled by Everytown for Gun Safety, Maryland suffers an average of almost 800 firearms fatalities each year and the rate of gun deaths rose over 50% from 2012 to 2022.¹ Perhaps the most disturbing element of this crisis is its effect on our children. Firearms are the leading cause of death in children and youth ages 1 to 21 in Maryland and the United States, surpassing injuries and death from motor vehicle crashes.² In Maryland, 131 children and teens died by gun violence in 2021, more than twice the number of deaths from motor vehicle

¹ <https://www.everytown.org/state/maryland/>

² CDC WISQARS On-line Causes of Injury-Related Death Data Base, Violence-related Firearm Deaths; Both Sexes; Age Range: 1 – 21; All Races and Ethnicity; US and Maryland; 2021.

crashes.³ Thirteen percent (13%) of the firearm deaths in Maryland were by suicide and 84% were homicides.⁴

The “whole-of-government” public health approach to reducing firearms violence outlined in Section 5203 of HB 582 offers an effective strategy for coordinating and enhancing both governmental efforts and the many effective community organizations that have been working so diligently to prevent gun violence and to deal with its results. It is clear that our state will not solve this problem solely through law enforcement strategies, and Section 5203’s focus on strengthening “evidence-based firearms violence prevention strategies” is likely to be very effective.

This evidence-based approach will allow the state to focus resources on communities hardest hit by gun violence. While gun violence affects the entire state, it is concentrated in low-income communities without adequate economic infrastructure. For example, Baltimore City’s gun homicide rate is 44.17 per 100,000 people⁵, compared to 8.9 statewide.⁶ This wide discrepancy in gun violence statistics is similar in other U.S. jurisdictions, where cities with the highest gun death rates and highest increase over time had higher proportions of residents living in poverty, higher rates of unemployment, and were more racially segregated than other communities.⁷

There are a wide variety of community-based programs that have proved effective in reducing gun violence and reducing its toll on individuals, including:

- Hospital Based Violence Intervention Programs that reach individuals immediately after they are injured and form relationships designed to reduce trauma and the risk of retaliation;
- Street Outreach Programs that interrupt cycles of violent conflict using credible messengers who act as mediators to prevent shootings, provide crisis response, and connect high-risk people with long-term support;
- Gun Violence Reduction Strategies that involve a partnership between law enforcement and communities to intervene with individuals at the highest risk of committing violence;
- Offices of Neighborhood Safety that take a holistic approach to neighborhood health and safety; and
- Suicide Prevention and Domestic Violence Victims Support Organizations.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ <https://bigcitieshealthdata.org/compare/?city=2&cities=3&metrics=11-01-03&years=&groups=&sort=name&geoSt rata=>

⁶ <https://www.everytown.org/state/maryland/>

⁷ [Gun Deaths in Big Cities | Urban Health Collaborative | Drexel University](#)

These are a few examples of the kinds of programs that will benefit from the Center for Violence Prevention created by this bill. Health care professionals, local government agencies, and faith-based charitable organizations will also benefit from the training and technical assistance provided for in the bill.

For these reasons, CIF recommends a favorable report on HB 583.