

A LIFEBRIDGE HEALTH GROUP

CENTER FOR HOPE

Advancing hope, healing and resilience



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Executive Director, Center for Hope

Date: March 28, 2024

To: Ways n Means Committee

Reference: SB784-Comprehensive community Safety Funding Act

Position: Favorable as Amended in the Senate

Dear Chair, Atterbeary and Distinguished Committee Members,

On behalf of LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope we thank you for this opportunity to provide comments and urge your support for Senate Bill 784 as amended. Center for Hope annually provides intervention and prevention services for over 7,700 survivors and caregivers impacted by child abuse, domestic violence, community violence, and elder justice. Over 4,300 of our population helped last year were children – many who were witness to, affected by, living regularly with gun violence. We recognize the devastating impact of violence on our community's health, and the growing number of victims of all ages affected. Violence is a public health issue, and we need to respond to our communities by partnering with the people in them to break the cycle of violence. The Comprehensive Community Safety Funding Act (Senate Bill 784) would impose a moderate excise tax on gross receipts from companies' firearm manufacturers. The legislation does not directly tax consumers.

SB784 directs new revenue to programs that are prepared to address violence via a medical intervention when needed, ensure victims of violence are supported, expand community-based violence intervention grants, and establish a Firearm Violence Prevention Center to conduct gun violence research, mitigating risks, early intervention strategies and assisting in implementing policy.

After decades of inaction, raising the tax on firearms would provide an offset to the massive cost to society of gun violence – exactly as taxes on alcohol and tobacco have successfully done. At the same time, this legislation will provide critical resources to critical programs have been historically underfunded. "The health of our communities is only as strong as the wellbeing of its citizens. Gun violence is not just a public safety issue, it's a public health crisis," said LifeBridge Health President and Chief Executive Officer Neil Meltzer.

Center for Hope within LifeBridge Health is the only model that integrates violence intervention and prevention throughout our hospital and community-based programs. To date our data has shown that based on our combined efforts with our safe streets' sites, hospital responders, Center for Hope clinicians, we have seen a 28% drop in Gun Shot Wound admissions which represents an overall 33% reduction in emergency department trauma volume. These programs can drive results and need sustainable funding to be effective.

For all the above stated reasons, we request a favorable report for SB784 as amended.

For more information, please contact:

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