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DATE: January 28, 2025
BILL NO.: House Bill 172
TITLE: Community Health and Safety Works Grand Program and Fund - Alterations
COMMITTEE: House Environment and Transportation Committee

Letter of Support

Description of Bill:

HB 172 makes alterations to the Community Health and Safety Works Grant Program to align with how the program is currently deployed. These changes are in the following areas: eligible project types; eligible applicants; requirements for the purchase or installation of license readers; repealing certain requirements for projects related to camera networks; repealing minimum and maximum grant amounts; and, expanding the authorized uses of the Community Health and Safety Works Grant Program Fund to include certain administrative and operating expenses of the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

Background and Analysis:

Launched in FY22 by DHCD, the Community Health and Safety Works program (CHSW) provides grant opportunities to Maryland communities through targeted investments in the physical environment that improve health and safety. The first two rounds of CHSW were funded at \$10 million each using American Rescue Plan Act funds. The third round was deployed in FY24 and supported by \$10 million in State General Funds.

In this most recent FY24 round, the program expanded the eligibility of applicants to local governments and anchor institutions in addition to tax-exempt non-profit organizations and broadened the eligible project types to include place-based projects that improve community safety and reduce environmental harm.

The Community Health and Safety Works program was codified in the 2024 legislative session. The proposed alterations to the program align with current program design and allow the department to shift focus areas and funding levels as community needs around violence prevention change. Alterations are further described below.

Eligible Projects

- Changes the eligible projects to: 1) Community or Business District Improvement Project; 2) Community-centered Crime and Violence Intervention and Prevention Project; and 3) other category of project identified by the Secretary of DHCD as a recognized crime prevention strategy designed to address environmental, health or safety concerns in commercial, public or residential areas.
- The Community or Business District Improvement Project category is the combination of the former Facility and Community Improvement Project and Business District and Neighborhood Security Project into one project category. The new project type still allows for facility improvements but requires applicants to demonstrate that the facility improvements align with community goals and improve community safety.



- The Community-centered Crime and Violence Intervention and Prevention Project category remains the same. And, the Secretary of DHCD may identify other eligible projects so the department can address a pressing environmental, safety or health issue not anticipated when the bill was codified.

Allowable Uses

- Expands the uses of the new Community or Business District Improvement Project category to include projects that: reduce harm from the urban heat island effect and other impacts of climate change; eliminate illegal dumping of trash that create a community nuisance and can signal that an area is unsafe; and/or mitigate traffic hazards that cause pedestrian or cyclist injury or death. These changes align with current program design. Traffic calming measures that increase pedestrian safety support Maryland’s Vision Zero efforts to prevent injuries from motor vehicle crashes and help communities create safe, walkable neighborhoods and downtowns.
- Allows for equipment to clean and maintain open spaces as well as contracting local private security services or similar community-based programs with a specific emphasis on the de-escalation of violent behavior. Communities, particularly in Baltimore City, cite these services as successful in reducing conflict and violence. Examples include Rose Street Community Center in East Baltimore and the PEACE Team in West Baltimore.
- Continues to fund security cameras but removes the requirement to submit evidence of a partnership with law enforcement, the governmental unit responsible for traffic enforcement for the political subdivision, and any other relevant public agencies. Many communities apply for cameras to be installed on privately owned homes and businesses, which are monitored by the businesses and residents and do not require a partnership with law enforcement to install and maintain. In Baltimore City applicants are encouraged to register private cameras with the city’s Community CitiWatch Partnership, a registry of private surveillance systems where residents can securely submit video evidence to the police when a crime occurs nearby. When requested by local governments, DHCD can require applicants to complete certain permission forms as part of the grant application, as the department has done when projects are located on land owned by DNR or Baltimore City Recreation and Parks.
- Continues to fund license plate readers and requires evidence of partnership with law enforcement because the readers connect to law enforcement databases and identify vehicles wanted in connection with a crime.

Eligible Applicants

- Allows governmental units and institutions of higher education in collaboration with a local neighborhood association to apply for all project types in addition to tax-exempt non-profit organizations.

Funding

- Removes the maximum and minimum grant amounts so that DHCD can adjust funding amounts as part of program design. Additionally, with limited staff capacity, it is difficult to manage and evaluate the impact of hundreds of small dollar awards per funding round.
- Expands uses of the Community Health and Safety Works Grant Program Fund to include certain administrative and operating expenses of DHCD in addition to providing grants for eligible applicants. This revision allows the department to receive modest funding for necessary operating expenses to deploy the program, including: review



of applications; coordination of grant agreements in a timely manner; collection and review of funding progress reports; and evaluation of the community impact of awards.

CHSW enhances the quality of life of targeted disinvested communities by strategically investing in locally-led community health and safety strategies. Below are examples of funded projects.

County Commissioners of Queen Anne's County; FY23, \$50,000

The \$50,000 CHSW grant played a key role in mitigating traffic harm in the Stevensville Arts & Entertainment District's traffic mitigation efforts in partnership with the Queen Anne's County Sheriff's Office, Parks Department, Planning & Zoning and Public Works. The grant funded the public art and safety signage to reduce speeds and raise awareness for pedestrian safety.

Cumberland; FY23, \$50,000

Critical measures were needed to combat crime and maximize the impact of the newly refurbished pedestrian mall to ensure the district continues to thrive and grow without concerns about safety for local citizens and visitors. The camera program funded by CHSW provided 60 cameras to businesses, complementing downtown investments and adding extra security and a sense of protection to encourage visitors to shop.

Ocean City; FY24, \$99,000

Ocean City is one of the state's most popular tourist destinations. Year-round residency of less than 7,000 swells to upwards of 300,000 in the summer season. During these busy months, Ocean City becomes Maryland's second largest municipality. Despite the fun and carefree environment, crime persists as an issue. CHSW funding supported CityWatch cameras around portions of the Boardwalk and surrounding area. CityWatch cameras have played an integral part in identifying and addressing threats to public safety.

Greater Baybrook Alliance; FY23, \$100,000

This grant funded the continuation of GBA's Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) program, which was piloted through the first round of CHSW funding. The program addresses targeted hot spots characterized by conditions that facilitate violence: high numbers of vacant properties, vacant lots, and unmanaged alleys on or adjacent to our commercial corridors. This distressed environment allows for negative use of public spaces, depresses positive economic activity for existing businesses and creates challenges for attracting new businesses. CPTED interventions include installing fencing, windows, and doors; exterior power washing/painting; lighting and cameras; and/or landscaping. Interventions will secure properties, improve sightlines, and signal control of space.

Southeast Community Development Corporation; FY24, \$100,000

This is a continuation of an FY23-funded CHSW project that engages the Rose Street Community Center to provide cleaning services and violence mediation in the Ellwood Park community. Rose Street's model of employing at-risk residents to clean blocks and alleys helps reduce blight, decrease violence, and improve perceptions of safety in the neighborhood. The crew leaders talk with members throughout the day about any tensions in the community, and they host informal and formal conflict mediations as needed. Since Rose Street's engagement, homicides are down and reports of illegal dumping, rats, and trash have declined. During that time, the number of "bulk pickups" scheduled increased, demonstrating that more residents are appropriately using City services to dispose of bulk trash.

DHCD Position

The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 172.

