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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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**Testimony in Support of HB 822 - Violence Intervention & Prevention
Program**

February 25, 2020 * Appropriations

What this bill does

This legislation builds on the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (MD VIPP) that the General Assembly established in the 2018 session (HB 432). MD VIPP was created to provide state support for the evidence-based practices that have had great success in other states and cities in helping to break the cycle of violence. As passed in 2018, VIPP authorized but did not mandate up to \$10 million dollars annually for programs. This legislation mandates \$10 million and strengthens the evaluation component of the program, to ensure that state funds are helping to develop a knowledge base on what works and funding programs that work.

This bill will ensure that MD VIPP will provide sustained and ongoing financial support to local governments and community-based organizations that use public health principles and demonstrate measurable positive outcomes in preventing violence, especially in regions that are disproportionately affected by violence.

HB 822 will also strengthen evaluation to measure the impact of MD VIPP by providing resources to hire evaluators whose findings would be available to the public. This bill will also clarify the role of the Advisory Committee, to advise on the distribution of funding, increase public awareness of the program, and review the efficacy of violence prevention programs receiving funding through MD VIPP.

Why this bill matters

No state or City that has shown a serious decrease in violence in the past decade has relied solely on policing. Instead, cities from Oakland to Boston to Chicago have used anti-violence strategies that evidence has demonstrated work to stop the cycle of killing. Cities have used programs like focused deterrence, street outreach and mediation, and cognitive behavioral therapy-based programming. These types of programs require sustained funding and evaluation - they cannot staff up, get started, and then risk losing grants because the state hasn't allocated funding for another year.

Several studies have indicated that "counties that produce better outcomes for children in low-income families tend to have . . . lower rates of violent crime." Additionally, exposure to violence is a "central mechanism" for limiting children's chances to improve their lives as adults.

To reduce crime, to increase public safety, we must invest in - and these are investments - programs that engage with high-risk individuals, help stop the cycle of violence, and provide a path forward for individuals to reimagine their lives without violence and as part of law-abiding society. We will not police ourselves to a safe and just society.

The deaths and injuries impose a massive social and economic burden on the state—costing an estimated \$1.3 billion per year to the state of Maryland. This includes healthcare costs (\$70 million per year), law enforcement and criminal justice expenses (\$145 million per year), costs to employers (\$8 million per year), and lost income (\$1.1 billion per year). Several peer-reviewed studies estimate the cost of a single murder to be between \$10 m and \$19.2m. These estimates include direct costs like lost labor and property damage, and medical and justice system costs. They also capture indirect costs like diminished quality of life. Although this bill comes with a price tag, there is no more important use of funding than saving lives and stopping the bleeding in our state. Compared to the overall cost of violence in Maryland, this funding is minimal. However, its importance cannot be overstated - this amount of money will create ongoing opportunities for local governments and community-based organizations to invest in programs that stop the bleeding and create more just and safer neighborhoods.

Why you should vote for this bill

Every good act that we try to take as a government and through non-profit providers is without effect if we cannot create a safe society. Every action a child or parent takes to improve their lives, to reach their potential, is hampered or blocked by high rates of violence. We want to lift up communities and give our state's children every best chance to succeed and to escape impoverished and under-resourced neighborhoods. To do that, we must end the violence that engulfs them. As Thomas Abt notes in his book *Bleeding Out*, "violence is not simply a manifestation of poverty; it is a force that perpetuates poverty." Urban violence is a cycle, and the cycle cannot be stopped by policing alone.

If we fail to fund efforts that we know work to stop violence, we cannot then be surprised that homicide rates continue unabated. We cannot simply say, "we don't know what to do," any more - because these programs show us what to do. Tested strategies exist that have shown huge decreases in violence in a more cost-effective way than policing. Those are the strategies that MD VIPP will seed and encourage. But without funding, none of this can happen. I urge a favorable report of HB 822.

Strengthening the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (MD VIPP)

The Epidemic of Daily Violence

Gun violence is an ongoing public health crisis in Maryland, where the state continues to suffer more than 1,000 shootings per year. The resulting deaths and injuries impose massive social and economic burdens—costing the state an estimated \$1.3 billion *per year*. In recognition of the need to address daily gun violence through the expansion of proven public-health strategies, the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (MD VIPP) was created in 2018. Although in its first year (FY19) the Governor included \$5m in his budget for these critical intervention programs, he provided \$0 in FY20. In addition, important evaluation and research components of MD VIPP were not fully implemented and there is a major need to get this program back on track.

Recommitting to Proven Solutions

This bill will make critical improvements to MD VIPP. First, in order to prevent harmful lapses in funding, this bill would *require* a yearly appropriation of at least \$10 million. Second, the bill would substantially strengthen the evaluation component of MD VIPP by providing resources for the state to contract with outside evaluators, whose findings would be made available to the public. Finally, the bill would clarify the role of the Advisory Council to advise the Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention (GOCCP) on the distribution of funding and raising awareness.

Key Provisions:

- Requires funding of \$10 million annually for MD VIPP
- Provides additional resources to GOCCP for administration, oversight, and evaluation, and requires evaluators to make their findings publicly available
- Clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Council to advise GOCCP in awarding funds and measuring program impact

Learning From Experience

States that have provided sustained support for evidence-based violence intervention programs have seen impressive reductions in violence in recent years. New York, which has long provided stable funding to such programs, has seen a remarkable 41% reduction in its gun homicide rate since 2010. In California, cities supported by the state's grant program, CalVIP, have seen reductions in homicides *three times greater* than other areas. Yet, where funding has been cut, increases in violence follow. Chicago has seen a spike in violence each time that state leaders cut funding for violence reduction programs.

Research shows that, when fully funded, street outreach programs in Baltimore neighborhoods have decreased killings by 56% and shootings by 34%. These are the kinds of strategies that are funded by MD VIPP. By making a number of crucial changes to the program, this bill will help put Maryland on the right path to addressing daily violence, and will improve public safety by ensuring that opportunities to intervene in daily violence are not missed.

