



**Testimony in Support of
SB 708/HB 822
Karen Herren, JD, Director of Legislative Affairs
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence**

February 25, 2020

Dear Chairman McIntosh, Vice-Chair Jackson, and Members of the Committee,

Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence is a local, grassroots organization dedicated to reducing gun deaths and injuries throughout the state of Maryland, with a particular focus on reducing urban gun violence and gun suicide. **We urge the committee to vote FAVORABLY on House Bill 822 to strengthen Maryland's Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (MD VIPP).**

There are unacceptably high rates of lethal and potentially lethal violence committed in public spaces within Maryland. Experts in the field of violence reduction are increasingly concluding that we must focus on the violence itself if we are going to be able to curb this trend. This takes more than just effective policing. The key appears to be to have programs in place to interrupt gun violence before it happens, and to effectively deal with gun violence and all of the people involved when it does happen. The path to doing this must also be evidence- and community- informed. In 2018, Maryland took an important step in recognizing this by passing legislation designed to implement the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (MD VIPP). Unfortunately, funding for this program has been inconsistent and/or nonexistent in the years since.

This legislation seeks to ensure adequate funding is applied to this work, to fine-tune the evaluation component of MD VIPP by providing appropriate resources, and to 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.

Maryland is currently seeing in excess of 1000 shootings each year. The costs of the resultant deaths and injuries is an estimated \$1.3 billion per year. Devoting adequate resources to reduce violence would work wonders in areas suffering from serious violence, and it would be affordable by any reasonable budgetary standard. As Thomas Abt, in his book *Bleeding Out* states, "If we truly value our fellow citizens who live under constant threat of violence, then we can find the modest sums necessary to keep them safe from harm." **We ask for a FAVORABLE report on HB 822.**