

## Testimony on **Violence Intervention Prevention Program (VIPP) Funding** (HB0822)

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Good afternoon, Delegates.

It's not **JUST** the money. And it's not just the wealth of work Professor Daniel Webster has done to find an answer to the plague of gun violence. It's **Davon Stewart**.

It's about an actual person and it's about a living community ripped to shreds everytime a gunshot shatters the air in what our President calls the "rat-infested" neighborhood of McElderry Park, in Baltimore, or anywhere else. Where **Rawshad Divers** was shot and killed a week ago. It's the **UNNAMED VICTIM**, found on Sunday on Sergeant Street in Baltimore.

We know because we've been there, where the heroes of Safe Streets, who stand between the combatants in Baltimore:

- Ask members of River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation to drive up from Potomac and Bethesda and stand together with them at the site of a shooting in McElderry Park ;
- Where we attend their Christmas party;
- Work with them in their garden or cleaning up a street, and
- Attend their barbeques with their grandmothers and children.

Every week, we honor and mourn the dead killed in Baltimore and DC during the past week, and every month our nearly all-white congregation hears the names and lights the candles that mourn and honor the death of each person killed in the Baltimore-Washington corridor during the past month. Last week they included **Rawshad**, and the week before, **Andre Giles** and **Isaiah Drummond**.

Now, let's remember how Pharaoh held the children of Israel in bondage for 430 years. White Americans have inflicted the same punishment on the descendants of African

Americans -- during 401 years of slavery, de-Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and economic degradation, which now poison the lives of those who live in East and West Baltimore. Red-lining, gentrification, education, non-employment and just plain racism kept **Deonte Henderson**, **Devante Smith**, and **Detrell Garvin** there, until they were shot dead.

And while it's not JUST about the money, it's clear from Dr. Webster's work at Johns Hopkins that a dependable stream of state funding flowing into neighborhoods like McElderry Park, to mend the communities there, would have made a difference in saving the lives of **Keith Thomas**, **Devin Henson**, and **Davon Stewart**.

Let's make sure that stream flows unimpeded, like a balm of righteousness, from your support of this legislation.