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2020 SESSION
Written Testimony

BILL NO: SB 708
COMMITTEE: Senate Judicial Proceedings and
Budget and Taxation
POSITION: Support
TITLE: Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund and
Advisory Council - Alterations

BILL ANALYSIS:

SB 708 Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund is to support effective violence reduction strategies by providing competitive grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations to fund evidence-based health programs or evidence-informed health programs. The fund will also evaluate the efficacy of evidence-based health programs or evidence informed health programs funded through the program.

POSITION RATIONALE:

Gun Violence is a leading cause for premature death in the United States and is the second most frequent cause of death among children and adolescents in the United States. U.S. firearm injuries are at epidemic proportions. There are 100,000 people shot annually, which calculates to over 270 per day. In 2017 there were 39,377 gun related deaths, with a cost of \$229 billion to the economy.

Nationally, according to the American Public Health Association:

- The burden of gun violence in the United States vastly outpaces that in comparable countries.
- Gun violence affects people of all ages and races in the U.S., but has a disproportionate impact on young adults, males and racial/ethnic minorities.
- Guns are a weapon of choice for mass homicides and suicides.

In Maryland firearm homicide claimed the lives of 1,316 people from 2016-2018 and another 788 individuals died from firearm suicide; these numbers do not include the thousands of people injured by a

firearm during the same timeframe. From 2015 to 2018, a total of 166 children died from firearm-related injuries in Maryland and nearly 80% of these were homicides (CDC, Fatal Injury Reports). Maryland has the sixth highest rate of gun homicides in the country. And, in 2019 alone, there were 21 mass shootings in Maryland, killing 12 people and injuring another 85 (Gun Violence Archive).

In Anne Arundel County, a gun was used to commit violence against a person almost every day in the past five years with a total of 1,168 incidents with a breakdown of 57 murders, 106 suicides, and 936 robberies. In 2019, the Anne Arundel County Executive established the Gun Violence Prevention Task Force to research and compile data on crimes involving guns and recommending actions to help reduce gun violence in the county. The Task Force issued a preliminary report in December of 2019 with a mandate to address gun violence as a public health issue across four broad categories:

- Intervening before gun violence
- Community outreach, communications and training
- Data collection
- Supporting gun safety measures

According to Dr. Georges Benjamin, the Executive Director of the American Public Health Association, gun violence should be treated similar to an epidemic. The same approach used to address an infectious disease outbreak, should also be employed to address gun violence. “We should track it, find the root causes, use science to find research gaps, create policy solutions and use mass public education campaigns to eradicate the threat...Gun violence is preventable.”

The Anne Arundel County Health Department is standing up a Gun Violence Intervention Team, modeled on the Opioid Intervention Team, to lead a cross-agency group to assess these recommendations for cost, feasibility and impact prior to implementing them.

This bill would provide critical funding for counties to assess and implement violence prevention strategies. In Anne Arundel County, we are establishing the infrastructure to comprehensively address violence prevention. A dedicated source of funding will enhance our ability to meaningfully implement solutions and collect the data needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach.