

**Senate Bill 708
MARYLAND VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION PROGRAM FUND AND
ADVISORY COUNCIL - ALTERATIONS**

**Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 5, 2020**

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore supports SB 708 which would strengthen the Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program through a mandated appropriation, altering the authorized use of funding and enhancing the advisory council.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of Marylanders each year, and an employer of over 2,000 people, we recognize the dignity of the individual and each individual's right to live in a just and peaceful society.

In February of 2016, in partnership with the City of Baltimore, the No Boundaries Coalition, St. Peter Claver Parish and others, Catholic Charities launched Safe Streets Baltimore in the Sandtown-Winchester community. Safe Streets is an evidenced-based, public health approach to violence that saves lives and dramatically reduces gun violence in communities where it has operated. In June 2019, we added a second Safe Streets site in the Brooklyn neighborhood.

Our Safe Streets colleagues are a constant presence in the neighborhoods they serve – walking the streets in bright orange shirts that read “Stop Shooting. Start Living.” When they hear of a potential conflict the team members that have a relationship with the people involved step in to help resolve the issue. Not only do they host their signature mediations, but they also host neighborhood gatherings, connect youth with other resources such as free school uniforms, and serve as referral source for workforce development programs. They truly are of and for the neighborhood.

From July 2018 - 2019, the Safe Streets Sandtown-Winchester team intervened in 251 incidents to prevent them from becoming incidents of gun violence. This is a program that has proven over and over again that it is helping to reduce the incidence of violence in the neighborhoods where it operates.

If we are serious about ending the violence that plagues our city, we must invest in evidence-based public health programs proven to reduce the incidence of gun violence. The Violence Intervention and Prevention Program targets state funding for these vital programs.

Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 708.