

Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence
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**Support of Senate Bill 708: Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund and
Advisory Council - Alterations**

Before the Judicial Proceedings and Budget and Taxation Committee
March 5th, 2020

Chairman Smith and Vice Chair Waldstreicher and Committee members,

As a Policy Analyst at the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence **I am writing in support of Senate Bill 708: Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund and Advisory Council - Alterations.** This legislation will ensure sustained funding and oversight of evidence-based programs which in many cities have reduced violent crime, shootings and homicides.¹ By supporting SB 708, the state will work towards addressing the gun violence crisis in Baltimore City, ensure sustained funding for evidence-based programs that save lives, and generate millions of dollars in long-term cost savings.

Baltimore City faces a gun violence crisis; policymakers must take swift steps to interrupt the cycles of violence devastating the city. Over the past five years (2015-2019) Baltimore City had the second-highest per-capita homicide rate of any city in this nation.² Over this time period, according to the Baltimore Sun, 1,456 Baltimoreans were murdered by a gun³ and 3,448 were shot and injured.⁴ The number of shooting victims each year in Baltimore could fill up every seat in the Maryland Senate chamber balcony 8 times over.⁵

Research consistently shows that most of this gun violence occurs within small networks of individuals caught in the cycles of retaliatory violence as both victim and perpetrator.⁶ Violence intervention and prevention programs interrupt these cycles of violence by identifying those at highest risk for violence, de-escalating conflicts, and connecting individuals to social support within the community. When adequately funded, these evidence-based interventions can reduce violent crime by up to 30%.^{7,8} Highlighted below are four examples of how state funding for violence intervention and prevention programs reduced violence.

- Connecticut's state-funded group violence intervention program was associated with a 21% decrease in shootings in New Haven each month the program was in effect.⁹
- A state-funded program in Massachusetts led to five fewer victims of violence each month and prevented nearly \$15 million in crime victimization over one year in Boston and Springfield.¹⁰
- New York's state investments in gun violence intervention and prevention programs helped reduce gun homicides across the state by 41% from 2010 to 2017.¹¹
- The City of Oakland used both state and city funds to invest in comprehensive community-based gun violence prevention efforts to cut homicides and nonfatal shootings nearly in half from 2012 to 2017.¹²

Violence intervention and prevention programs have the greatest impact when they are consistently funded. As highlighted in the two case examples below, inconsistent state funding can jeopardize the effectiveness of these programs.

- In March 2015, state funding for Chicago’s violence intervention program was cut and all but one site was shut down. This cut coincided with a dramatic increase in gun violence resulting in 2016 having the highest number of homicides in Chicago in over 10 years.¹³
- A Baltimore violence intervention program (Safe Streets) is linked to short-term reductions in violence in certain neighborhoods but not sustained reductions across the city. The program has suffered from inconsistent funding since its founding in 2007. With increased resources and commitment from policymakers, researchers are optimistic that this program will reduce gun violence significantly over the long run.¹⁴ SB 708 could help provide sustained funding for this program.

SB 708 ensures that Maryland’s violence intervention and prevention efforts are sustainably funded so that they can effectively save lives. Thomas Abt, a Senior Research Fellow at Harvard University and former policymaker at the US Department of Justice, calculated that it would cost \$10.3 million in the first year to build out effective violence prevention and intervention programs in Baltimore City. He estimates that with this funding these programs would reduce homicides by at least 10% each year. **Mr. Abt’s research suggests that the adequate funding created by SB 708 could save 788 lives over an eight year period.**¹⁵

SB 708 will generate millions of dollars in long-term cost-savings. Gun violence directly costs Maryland millions of dollars each year in healthcare services, law enforcement investigations, court fees, and incarceration costs. Homicides also inflict an enormous indirect economic burden through lost productivity and stunted economic growth. In total, economists estimate that each murder costs society between \$4.1 and \$17.2 million.^{16,17} This suggests that the entire cost (\$10 million a year) of SB 708 would be offset in the long-term by the prevention of 1-2 homicides each year. Mr. Abt’s cost-benefit analysis of violence intervention and prevention efforts in Baltimore city found that an **annual investment similar to what SB 708 proposes would generate \$7.8 billion in cost savings over eight years.**¹⁸

As Policy Analyst at the Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence, I urge you to support SB 708. The passage of this bill will ensure that violence intervention and prevention efforts are properly funded and that the funding is stable. The evidence is clear: sustained state investment in violence intervention and prevention programs will both save lives and generate millions of dollars in economic cost-savings.

Ari Davis, MPP - Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence

References

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- ¹⁸ Abt T. (2019). Bleeding Out: The Devastating Consequences of Urban Violence--and a Bold New Plan for Peace in the Streets. *Basic Books*. See: Chapter 11 and appendix B.