

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 822**  
**February 25, 2020 \* Appropriations Committee**

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson and Committee Members,

As you know, Baltimore closed 2019 with a tragic 348 homicides, making the second worst year on record. The human cost of this violence is immeasurable, the economic costs are exorbitant: each year Maryland's average of 1,652 shootings have a direct cost to the taxpayer of \$294 million and lead to an additional \$1.1 billion in lost income (Giffords 2018).

The sad reality is that while slashing the rates of gun violence in Maryland will take a great deal of effort and coordination from many systems, there are proven, evidence-based interventions that can make significant inroads to reducing violence.

At Roca, we use a time-tested strategy for reducing violence and incarceration. We focus intensely on the specific individuals who are driving violence and bring trauma-informed services to these very high-risk young men. Our work has four main components. We create safety and stability by building meaningful relationships and providing moments free from harm. We used Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT) to teach young men to regulate their emotions and make better choices instead of letting their trauma take over and send them into "survival mode." We help young men practice work, get an education, and learn skills in a way that serves as a space for them to change, relapse, and change further. And finally, we engage systems and institutions around our young men so that we can all coordinate better in working towards shared outcomes. Using this approach, we have had fantastic success in the past:

- In 2019 in Massachusetts, of the 297 very high-risk young men that had completed the first two intensive years of our four-year model: 97% had no new arrests or incarcerations and 70% of those placed in jobs retained employment for six months or more (Roca Outcomes Data).
- While 85% of young men come to Roca with a violent offense on their record, 4 out of 5 stop engaging in violent crime (Abt Associates 5-Year study, 2014-2018).



While our young men in Baltimore are all still in the first two years of the Intervention Model, they have also made incredible gains. Of 95 young men enrolled in the first year of Baltimore services (ending June 30, 2019), 91% of young men engaged in employment, education, CBT, or life skills programs. This rate of engagement is even higher than our Massachusetts average of 84%, strongly suggesting that Roca's Baltimore participants are on a pathway to recovering from trauma and violence and making sustained life changes.

It is essential to recognize that our emphasis on helping young men recover from trauma, develop better emotional regulation, and learn skills for the workforce does not mean that we don't support effective policing. In fact, the Baltimore Police Department is our most important partner. We recognize that programs and policing go hand in hand. It is much more difficult to simply break bad behavior than it is to replace it with good behavior. Moreover, when communities of color feel that their young men are being given the resources, they need to be successful, they are more likely to perceive policing efforts as legitimate.

We believe that Maryland VIPP is the right mechanism to fund effective interventions like Roca. Not only does Maryland VIPP require that grantees use evidenced-based interventions, once HB 822 is passed the fund will provide resources to the state to contract with independent evaluators, whose findings will be made public and ensure that VIPP is only investing in high-return programs.

In order for Maryland VIPP to be effective, it needs guaranteed funding. No fund like VIPP can be effective if resourced only for one year. Funding VIPP at \$10 million per year is a small investment for enormous returns. The cost of a single shooting is over \$800,000 in Maryland (Giffords 2018). The average cost of one year of incarceration in Maryland is \$45,000 (Vera 2015). These numbers don't even include the long-term costs to the health system, lost economic development and home value, and most importantly the devastating consequences to families when sons, brothers, and fathers are killed.

Ultimately, as a state we have to recognize that all Marylanders have a right to safe neighborhoods. Focusing resources on proven, evidence-based practices is the most effective way to guarantee that right.

**Thank you for your time and service to restoring safety to our communities,**

**Molly Baldwin, James Timpson, and Amar Mukunda  
Roca Baltimore**