



Maryland
Hospital Association

March 7, 2022

To: The Honorable Shane E. Pendergrass, Chair, House Health & Government Operations
Committee

Re: Letter of Support- House Bill 1377 - Childhood Exposure to Violence - Health and Social
Impacts - Public Awareness Campaign Workgroup

Dear Chair Pendergrass:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 60 member hospitals and health
systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on House Bill 1377.

Interpersonal violence is a major public health problem in the United States. Hospitals play an
important role in caring for these victims of violence. Despite the setting and form of violence,
the impact on a child's emotional well-being can be far-reaching. A 10-year study from the
University of Michigan found that increased early exposure to weapon use within a family
predicted more use or threats of gun use.^{1,2} Cumulative exposure to neighborhood gun violence
predicted an increase in arrests for weapon-related crimes.³ However, research suggests
disrupting violence can lead to positive outcomes.⁴ HB 1377 provides another tool to increase
awareness and prevention. Ending the cycle of violence is a priority hospitals share with
community-based organizations that have engaged in this work for years.

Children experiencing trauma have a greater risk of long-term negative physical and mental
health.⁵ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 61% of adults in 25 states
report having at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE), and nearly one in six report four
or more.⁶ In Maryland, 23% of adults on average report experiencing three to eight ACEs.⁷
These include child abuse, neglect, witnessing community violence, death of a family member,
and incarceration of a relative. Adults with the highest ACE scores reduced their life expectancy
by up to 20 years.⁸ Black and Hispanic youth and youth from low-income families are more
likely to experience three or more adverse events.⁹

¹ University of Michigan News. (July 26, 2021). "[Childhood Exposure to Gun Violence Increases Risk of Violent Behavior as Adults](#),".

² Huesmann, L.R. et al. (June 19, 2021). "[Longitudinal predictions of young adults' weapons use and criminal behavior from their childhood exposure to violence](#)." *Aggressive Behavior*, 47(6), 621-634.

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Institute of Justice. (September 21, 2016). "[Children Exposed to Violence](#),".

⁵ US Department of Health & Human Services. (n.d.). "[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#),".

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). "[Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences](#),".

⁷ Maryland Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. (January, 2020). "[Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\) in Maryland: Data from the 2018 Maryland BRFSS](#),".

⁸ Texas Health and Human Services. (n.d.). "[Cross-Systems Trauma-Informed Care](#),".

⁹ Child Trends. (n.d.). "[Adverse Childhood Experiences](#),".

Maryland hospitals support comprehensive efforts to address the root causes driving disparities in health outcomes, which is aligned with the field's [Commitment to Racial Equity](#). One of the key initiatives prioritized by MHA's Health Equity Task Force is reducing health disparities by addressing social determinants of health and inequity that often underlies housing, education, nutrition, employment, and public safety. Research shows people can overcome traumatic experiences with the appropriate supports and interventions.¹⁰

HB 1377 would establish a work group to develop a public awareness and prevention campaign on childhood exposure to violence. This campaign would include complex topics such as the health and social risks associated with childhood exposure to violence and education on the signs and symptoms of trauma. The stakeholders outlined in the legislation provide the expertise needed to develop the campaign and promote broad dissemination of the materials produced.

To ensure geographical and diverse representation for our 60 member hospitals and health systems, we recommend including MHA as the entity that will designate the two hospital representatives on the work group. We commend the sponsor for introducing this legislation to establish the work group and look forward to the results of their efforts to protect the well-being of Maryland's children, who are the future of our state.

For more information, please contact:
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¹⁰ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (July, 2014). "[SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)."