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**TESTIMONY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND PROGRESS INITIATIVE
 ON FEBRUARY 29, 2024
 BEFORE THE MARYLAND SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
 SUPPORTING SENATE BILL 475 - CROSS-FILED WITH: SB475
 CENTER FOR FIREARM VIOLENCE PREVENTION – ESTABLISHMENT**

Honorable Chair Pamela Beidle, Vice-Chair Katherine Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee:

The University of Maryland’s PROGRESS Initiative provides this testimony in support of Senate Bill 475 - Center for Firearm Violence Prevention – Establishment, sponsored by President of the Senate Bill Ferguson by request of the Moore Administration and the many Co-sponsor Senators. Responding to the need to address the epidemic of gun violence, this legislation establishes the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention in the Maryland Department of Health to reduce firearm violence, harm from firearm violence, and misuse of firearms. SB475 calls for a public health approach to firearm violence reduction that would emphasize science-informed actions; utilizing data and research to formulate effective strategies and solutions; and coordination between federal, state, and local agencies and authorities including academia, law enforcement, communities and advocates.

Gun violence in America continues to be a tragic and uniquely American epidemic affecting all communities all across our country. Schools, churches, mosques, synagogues, grocery stores, hospitals, malls, entertainment venues, nightclubs, neighborhoods, streets, malls, and homes are not safe places. According to the CDC, there were 48,830 firearm deaths in the US in 2021, amounting to nearly 134 fatalities on average every day from homicide, suicide, unintentional injury, and legal intervention.¹ Firearm related morbidity is estimated at 3-5 times the number of deaths with untold human and capital costs.

In Maryland in 2021 there were 915 deaths from firearms with 592 homicides and 310 deaths by suicide.² Gun violence is now the leading cause of death for children and youth surpassing motor vehicle deaths and those caused by other injuries in our State. Baltimore and Prince George’s County account for 75% of all fatal and nonfatal shootings in the State.

Root factors such as poverty, racism, misinformation, and law enforcement tensions have been inextricably linked to the rising numbers of homicide, suicide, and mass shooting firearm deaths. For decades, gun violence has been the leading cause of death and disability among

¹ CDC Wisqars On-line Causes of Injury-Related Death Data Base, Violence-related Firearm Deaths; Both Sexes; All Ages; All Races and Ethnicity; US and Maryland; 2021.
<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/explore/?o=MORT&y1=2021&y2=2021&g=00&g=24&t=0&i=0&m=20890&d=&s=0&r=0&m=0&ry=2&yp=65&e=0&a=ALL&a1=0&a2=199&g1=0&g2=199>

² Ibid





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Black males ages 16-44. It has become the leading cause of death for children and youth in the US, surpassing motor vehicle crash deaths. Gun violence costs Maryland an estimated \$10.5 billion annually with Maryland taxpayers bearing an estimated \$384 million.^{3,4,5}

Preventing the tragic consequences of gun violence in our communities and our nation is among the highest priorities and grand challenges of our time. University of Maryland President Darryll J. Pines has directed action now to “do something” to summon all of our strengths and assets to act for the public’s good and prevent gun violence and save lives. He said, “Effective solutions to grand challenges demands fearless ideas...” and established The University of Maryland Prevent Gun Violence: Research, Empowerment, Strategies and Solutions (PROGRESS) Initiative in November 2023.

The provisions of SB475 to establish the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention focused on employing a public health approach in addition to legislative/law enforcement strategies are consonant with and complimentary to PROGRESS. PROGRESS addresses two key pillars of the University of Maryland's strategic plan: to accelerate solutions to humanity’s grand challenges and to advance the public good. Sponsored by the Office of the President and housed within the College of Behavior and Social Science, the mission of PROGRESS is to reduce firearm-related violence using a multi-disciplinary, community-based and translational science public health approach to promote actionable gun violence interventions to promote public safety and enhance the quality of life for the people of Maryland, the National Capital Region, and the nation. UMD President Darryll Pines tasked Joseph Richardson, PhD and Woodie Kessel, MD, MPH with developing, implementing and leading PROGRESS.

SB475 is also consistent with the recently established White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention responsibilities including enhancing the federal government’s partnerships with cities and states to help them advance their own efforts to reduce gun violence.⁶

In summary, SB475 offers a comprehensive approach that will enhance the safety of Marylanders aligning with evidence-based practices and addressing critical issues related to the prevention of gun violence employing an important public health approach. PROGRESS urges the committee to produce a favorable report supporting Senate Bill 475 (and the cross-filed

³ The Economic Cost of Gun Violence. 7.19.22; <https://everytownresearch.org/report/the-economic-cost-of-gun-violence/>

⁴ Cost of gun violence: Ted R. Miller and Bruce Lawrence analysis of CDC fatal injury: 2019 and HCUP nonfatal injury: 2019.

⁵ Gun Violence in Maryland. EveryStat.org

⁶ FACT SHEET: Vice President Harris Launches the Biden-Harris Administration Safer States Initiative, Highlights New Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/12/13/fact-sheet-vice-president-harris-launches-the-biden-harris-administration-safer-states-initiative-highlights-new-executive-actions-to-reduce-gun-violence/>





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House version HB 583) to build on Maryland's efforts to prevent the trauma and nightmare of gun violence in our State. Nothing could be more important.



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PROGRESS is a University of Maryland Fearlessly Forward Initiative sponsored by the Office of the President and housed within the College of Behavior and Social Sciences (BSOS).