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Maryland General Assembly- Senate Finance Committee  
3 East  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter of support for SB 475 Center for Firearm Violence Prevention – Establishment

February 28, 2024

Chair Beidle and the Senate Finance Committee,

The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI) is pleased to support SB 475 “Center for Firearm Violence Prevention – Establishment.” This bill would create an office within the Department of Health to craft a coordinated response to firearm violence across the state. We respectfully ask that your committee provide a favorable report for this important legislation.

The HAVI represents a national network of hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIPs). HVIPs are victim service providers that use patient-focused strategies to break the cycle of violence and reduce rates of repeat injury. Founded in 2009, the HAVI represents 50 programs across the United States. In fact, the R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center Violence Intervention Program was one of our founding members, with UM Capital Region Health, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Lifebridge Health, Youth Advocate Programs, and the ROAR Center subsequently joining.

In recent years, the establishment of centers for firearm violence prevention has emerged as a best practice for the development of comprehensive strategies to end gun violence. These offices serve multiple important roles, including: developing an all-of-government plan to address the issue, coordinating work between disparate agencies such as justice, health, education, and housing, coordinating programmatic funding, and acting as trusted subject matter experts for all levels of government.

These offices elevate strategies that address community violence through a public health lens and broaden opportunities to be solution-oriented in addressing community violence, rather than reactive. They engage directly with the communities most impacted by violence, and help promote community-based solutions. By involving community members, policymakers at the local & state level, and community-based organizations, they shape interventions to support local needs. This collaborative approach ensures that solutions are trauma-informed, culturally competent, relevant, and sustainable.

The HAVI has had the privilege of working with similar offices throughout the country and have found them to be effective in both obvious and non-obvious ways. Below is a list of a few tangible examples from the last year:

- The HAVI received a message from the Governor's office of a midwestern state inquiring about a new policy they were considering adopting: covering violence prevention with Medicaid dollars. We were told directly that they learned of the policy option during a meeting with the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention. This is a prime example of how a newly formed center in Maryland could provide best practices to cities and counties throughout the state who are looking for solutions to ending firearm violence, but could use assistance from a trusted voice.
- In California, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention has taken a central role in coordinating the implementation a bill to reimburse the work of frontline violence prevention professionals. Prior to their involvement, frontline violence intervention organizations faced significant challenges navigating state bureaucracies as the particular policy touched multiple state agencies, including the Department of Health Care Services, Department of Public Health, and Department of Justice. The Office of Gun Violence Prevention was able to assume a coordinating role between the three which led to significant progress in the implementation.
- In North Carolina, the newly established Office of Violence Prevention has already assumed a convening role. Its advisory board includes representatives from antiviolence organizations, physicians, law enforcement, and local government. By bringing a broad swath of perspectives to the table, they are beginning new cooperative strategies that previously would have been unlikely to occur.

We believe SB 475 is an important step to ensure public safety across Maryland. Given the devastating consequences of firearm violence in our state, it is critical that we create structures within the government to address the issue in a thoughtful manner. We believe that this bill does just that.

For these reasons, we ask that the Senate Finance Committee provide a favorable report on SB 475 Center for Firearm Violence Prevention – Establishment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kyle Fischer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kyle Fischer, MD, MPH  
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The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (HAVI)  
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