
SB 475
Favorable

TO: The Honorable Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and Members of the Committee
Maryland Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Jen Pauliukonis, MPH
Director of Policy and Programming, Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions

DATE: February 29, 2024

RE: Senate Bill 475: Establishment of the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention

Johns Hopkins University and Medicine urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 475 – Establishment of the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention. The office will be created within the Maryland Department of Health and will take a public health approach to preventing gun violence.

As the Director of Policy and Programming for the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, I am very happy to support this legislation. Our Center conducts and translates rigorous research to inform effective policy solutions, and develops, advocates for, and defends equitable and innovative policies and programs to end the epidemic of gun violence. The new office will align well with the work of the Center for Gun Violence Solutions.

I want to first differentiate between my own organization and the program described in the bill, the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention. Our university-based organization is a part of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and employs expert faculty and staff to study the impacts of gun violence prevention and develop and strengthen policy solutions both at the federal and state level. The Center for Firearm Violence Prevention established in House Bill 583 within the Maryland Department of Health will serve as a hub between a variety of federal, state, and local agencies to ensure Maryland's firearm-related laws are fully implemented and life-saving community violence intervention programs are funded and evaluated.

Currently, 8 states and the District of Columbia, as well as dozens of counties and municipalities, have offices of gun violence prevention. These offices build the infrastructure to effectively address the crisis of gun violence in a comprehensive manner, including by supporting community-based organizations saving lives on the ground.

The Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention in Senate Bill 475 seeks to utilize the public health approach to reduce gun deaths and injuries across the state of Maryland. Using public health to address violence and injury requires using evidence and data to understand what causes violence and develop evidence-informed solutions. The Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and

Intervention will:

- Acquire data and statistics and collaborate with research institutions for analysis to improve laws and programs;
- Facilitate coordination between federal agencies and a variety of state agencies, such as the Maryland Health Department, the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention, victim Services, local and county municipalities, and law enforcement;
- Provide technical assistance and model processes for community violence intervention programs in impacted communities;
- Create public awareness campaigns;
- Leverage federal and state resources to strengthen grant programs for a variety of violence reduction programs and crisis intervention; and
- Collaborate with communities most impacted by gun violence.

While many of the state-level offices of gun violence prevention are new and there is limited research on their effectiveness, one promising example is the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) created within the Massachusetts's governor's office in 2011. While the full scope of the initiative is more narrowly focused on evidence-informed youth and community violence intervention programs, it serves as a collaborative between the governor's office, local law enforcement, and youth violence reduction programs. The SSYI works to funnel key state and federal funding to these intervention programs and develop ongoing process and impact evaluations to ensure accountability. The SSYI conducted a multi-year comprehensive evaluation published in 2020. The researchers compared the cities that were a part of the SSYI program to other cities outside the program and found fewer rates of violent crime among youth aged 14-24 years of age and saved the state over \$32 million annually in violent crime victimization costsⁱ. The evaluation was so successful, that the original 11 cities within the program has now been expanded to 14. The vision for Maryland's Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention is even more bold and comprehensive than the Massachusetts example.

Johns Hopkins University and our Center fully support the comprehensive and holistic scope of Senate Bill 475, which will address all types of gun violence in Maryland including firearm suicide, domestic violence, community violence, and mass violence. By using a public health lens for the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention, system actors will be able to fully understand the size and scope of the gun violence epidemic, which factors most put our communities at risk, and which laws and programs are most effective at keeping our communities safe. Maryland has enacted an array of evidence-informed gun laws, such as extreme risk protective orders, handgun purchaser licensing, and child access prevention laws. The creation of the Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention will strengthen the collaboration and enforcement of the laws currently on the books, thus increasing the impacts of those laws and saving lives. It will also ensure that key data is shared between different agencies and reduce duplicative work being conducted on the issues of gun violence prevention to improve results and save crucial resources in the efforts to reduce gun violence.

Accordingly, Johns Hopkins respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on **Senate Bill 475**.

ⁱ The Massachusetts Safe and Successful Youth Initiative: A Promising Statewide Approach to Youth Gun and Gang Violence in the Fall 2020 issue of *Translational Criminology* (p 7-9).