



February 29, 2024

To: Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier and the Finance Committee
Reference: SB475 - Center for Firearm Violence Prevention - Establishment
Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope we thank you for this opportunity to provide information in strong support for SB475. Center for Hope annually provides intervention and prevention services for over 7,700 survivors and caregivers impacted by child abuse, domestic violence, community violence, and elder justice. Over 4,300 of our population helped last year were children – many who were witness to, affected by, living regularly with gun violence. At LifeBridge Health, we recognize the devastating impact of violence in our communities, and the growing number of victims of all ages. This is a public health issue. We help our communities by partnering with the people in them to break the cycle of violence. At Center for Hope, we partner with community leaders, stand shoulder to shoulder with parents and caregivers, and help provide survivors of violence and crime with support and healing, in order to grow a collective hope for a better city and a better world.

Firearm injuries is now the leading cause of death for children across the United States¹. An alarming 4,752 children died from firearm injuries in 2021 - the American Academy of Pediatrics reports that is a 41.6% increase in pediatric firearm deaths from 2018 to 2021². According to data released this week by the Ad Council Research Institute, an overwhelming majority of adults in America (79%) find gun violence to be one of their top concerns³.

Use of a firearm has also become the leading form of suicide in the United States. In America, 67 people die by gun suicide every day – which is more than the number of people who die from firearm murders and unintentional shootings combined⁴. Access to a firearm triples the risk of death by suicide, and on average suicide attempts by a gun are fatal 90% of the time. Evidence shows that in a moment of crisis, having a firearm that is stored securely — locked, unloaded, and away from ammunition — can prevent those fatal outcomes.⁵

¹ <https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/child-and-teen-firearm-mortality-in-the-u-s-and-peer-countries/>

² <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/152/3/e2023061296/193711/Trends-and-Disparities-in-Firearm-Deaths-Among?autologincheck=redirected>

³ <https://www.adcouncil.org/learn-with-us/ad-council-research-institute/pulse-gun-violence-in-america-poll>

⁴ <https://www.bradyunited.org/key-statistics>

⁵ <https://www.adcouncil.org/learn-with-us/press-releases/safe-stories-national-psa-campaign-responds-to-growing-gun-suicide-epidemic#:~:text=In%20the%20U.S.%2C%2067%20people,of%20the%20time%20on%20average.>

From Baltimore City to Baltimore County to Carroll County, Center for Hope and its parent organization LifeBridge Health has seen the tremendous impact that gun violence has had upon our community and its health care. For many years now, including our 2023 recent community health needs assessment, our neighbors have told us that violence and mental health are among their top health concerns. Our health system recognizes its role in keeping its community safe and in preventing gun violence as a health care priority. Our communities and our country demand solutions and answers now.

Just as LifeBridge Health has taken a public health approach to reducing gun violence, we applaud and stand by Maryland's efforts to reduce the harm from firearm violence. Public health approaches to societal issues have provided great success in Maryland to reduce future harm and injury: for example, B'more for Healthy Babies has been a campaign to reduce infant mortality in Baltimore City through emphasis on policy change, service improvements, community mobilization, and behavioral change – this has improved infant mortality by 28% since the initiative's launch. Similar campaigns have reduced smoking deaths, auto injury, and reduced overdose fatalities.

Looking to find solutions for a reduction in gun violence is an issue of national importance and Maryland is a leader in finding solutions to reduce gun violence. The proposal of a state level office mirrors that of the strategy from the White House to establish a similar office and will greatly benefit from coordination with federal partners.

Within LifeBridge Health, our Center for Hope is seeing success through a combination of coordinated gun violence responses. In Baltimore City, through our coordinated efforts, we have seen a remarkable 28% reduction in gunshot wound admissions in the Sinai Emergency Department (a level II center) from FY22 to FY23. Those decreases continue today with an additional 50% drop this year to date. Our efforts with community violence interrupters, credible messengers, and coordinated services can be emblematic to similar statewide efforts and solutions.

We urge you to support and give SB475 a favorable report to establish a Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention within the Maryland Department of Health. By embracing a public health approach and investing in community-driven solutions, we can create a safer and more just Maryland for generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,

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