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TESTIMONY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND PROGRESS INITIATIVE
ON MARCH 5, 2025
BEFORE THE MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
REGARDING HOUSE BILL HOUSE BILL 934
CENTER FOR FIREARM VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION – RESOURCES, TOOLS, AND
EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Honorable Chair Luke Clippinger and Vice Chair J. Sandy Bartlett and distinguished members of Judiciary Committee:

The University of Maryland’s PROGRESS Initiative is pleased to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 934, Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention – Resources, Tools, and Educational Materials, sponsored by Delegate Lesley J. Lopez.

Gun violence in America is a tragic epidemic happening in our homes; on our streets; in our schools, churches, synagogues mosques, grocery stores, hospitals, campuses, malls, arenas, nightclubs, bars, bowling alleys and communities. Data from the CDC’s newly released “Injury, Overdose, and Violence Dashboard” for September 2023 – August 2024, the most recent 12-month period of data available, indicates that 44,830 United States residents died from firearm injuries: homicide, suicide, unintentional shooting, legal intervention shooting, and deaths of undetermined intent. The U.S. rate of all firearm injury deaths for that period was 123 per day and was 13.4 per 100,000 people. In Maryland, there were 711 deaths from firearms with 401 homicides and 300 deaths by suicide from September 2023 to August 2024. Maryland’s rate of all firearm injury deaths was 11.5 per 100,000 people, which is approximately 15% lower than the overall US rate.

Moreover, 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 (and in the US at large). Together, Baltimore and Prince George’s County account for 75% of all fatal and nonfatal shootings in the state. Morbidity from gun violence is estimated to be 3-5 times the number of deaths.

Root factors such as poverty, racism, misinformation, and law enforcement tensions are 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 Black males ages 16-44. Now it has become the leading cause of death for children and youth in the US, surpassing motor vehicle crash deaths. Gun violence costs Maryland approximately \$10.5 billion annually with Maryland taxpayers bearing an estimated \$384 million of these costs.

Responding to the need to address the tragic dimensions of the epidemic of gun violence, House Bill 934 enables the Maryland Department of Health’s Center for Firearm Violence Prevention—under the able leadership of Jen Pauliukonis—to focus on implementing a public health approach to firearm violence reduction. HB0934 calls for the Center to work in consultation with the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services, the Maryland State Police, communities disproportionately impacted by firearm violence, and public health and firearm safety experts, to craft an evidence-based “State Plan for a Public Health Approach to Reducing Firearm Violence.” The Plan would utilize and share cross-jurisdictional data and research to formulate effective firearm prevention and intervention



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strategies and solutions to be implemented by State and local agencies and entities, including academia, law enforcement, community and faith-based organizations, and health care professionals. In addition, HB0934 advises the Center to consider launching public awareness campaigns and creating resources, tools, and educational materials for firearm harm reduction strategies, including: secure storage of firearms, implementation of Extreme Risk Protective Orders, and a suicide and crisis lifeline call-in helpline.

In response to the firearm epidemic and public safety crisis, in November 2023 President Darryll Pines of the University of Maryland (UMD) launched a campus-wide “grand challenge” initiative—the Prevent Gun Violence: Research, Empowerment, Strategies and Solutions (PROGRESS) initiative. Working directly from the Office of the UMD President, PROGRESS uniquely summons all of the university’s multidisciplinary assets and expertise in gun violence prevention scholarship, practice and policy—from designing safer school buildings, to engineering safer firearms, to applying AI to generate solutions, to supporting actionable community-based solutions in coordination with community representatives.

Led by UMD Professors Joseph Richardson, PhD, and Woodie Kessel, MD, MPH, PROGRESS is addressing the causes, collateral consequences and solutions to gun violence in the state of Maryland, the National Capital Region, and nationally. PROGRESS is committed to advancing science for action, scholarship, education and actionable gun violence prevention/intervention solutions. The initiative has prioritized equity and anti-racism by directly partnering with communities that are most affected by gun violence. PROGRESS educates and engages students and faculty and collaborates with colleagues and community leaders—regionally and nationally—to transform scientific knowledge into life-saving community actions using all available UMD assets. PROGRESS practices an inclusive approach that emphasizes local engagement and empowerment through partnerships with Community-based Organizations (CBOs), health departments, foundations, businesses, government entities, and law enforcement to disseminate research findings and implement innovative interventions and programs. We have held a series of dialogues with active CBO participation on topics such as design justice, data and technology, and media reporting to help reduce firearm-related violence. PROGRESS looks forward to working with the Maryland Center for Firearm Violence Prevention on a comprehensive translational-science approach that draws, analyzes, and applies multiple kinds of data, including public health and criminal justice/legal unified data and employing a multidisciplinary, community empowerment, and public health approach to promote actionable gun violence interventions that save lives in Maryland.

In sum, the provisions of HB0934 and the work of the Maryland Center for Firearm Violence Prevention are essential to help reduce the harm from gun violence. These efforts compliment Maryland’s strong firearm laws and the work of PROGRESS. Delegate Lopez’s HB0934 builds momentum toward a comprehensive public health strategy of violence prevention that will preserve lives and enhance the safety of Marylanders. PROGRESS urges the Committee to produce a favorable report in support of House Bill 0934 as an important step for preventing the trauma and nightmare of gun violence in our State. Nothing could be more important.

Thank you.
The PROGRESS Team



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