

Testimony in Support of HB987, Public Safety – Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund – Alterations (Community Safety and Intervention Funding Act)

Presented by Lydia C. Watts, Esq., MPH, Executive Director, the Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center at University of Maryland, Baltimore To the Judiciary Committee

March 10, 2026

My name is Lydia Watts. I am the Executive Director of the Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR) Center at the University of Maryland, Baltimore. I am submitting this written testimony **in support of HB987, Public Safety – Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program Fund – Alterations (Community Safety and Intervention Funding Act)**. The views expressed herein are mine as an expert in the field and are not the views of the University of Maryland, Baltimore. ROAR provides wrap-around services to victims of crime in Baltimore City. Since June 2019 when ROAR started providing services, we have assisted over 900 people, all of whom are survivors of crime ranging from homicides, non-fatal shootings, rapes, assaults, intimate partner violence, and more.

The last three years, we have seen significant reductions of homicides (the majority of which are by guns) and non-fatal shootings since the record highs across the US in 2020. According to the MD Firearm Violence Data Dashboard¹,

Homicides in Baltimore City				
Year	Number	Sex	Race	Age
2025	125	83.7% male; 16.3% female	82.5% Black	Ages 35-39 17.1%
2024	192	89.6% male; 10.4% female	82.6% Black	Ages 30-34 18.5%
2020	327	86.1% male; 13.9% female	87% Black	Ages 20-24 25.6%
Non-fatal shootings in Baltimore City				
2025	229/642 ED visits	85.1% male; 10.9% female	65.1% Black	Average 30.7
2024	279/780 ED visits	84.6% male; 14.7% female	81.4% Black	Average 31.9
2020	530/1,410 ED visits (first year of the	87.4% male; 10.7 % female	77.3% Black	Average 29.6

	Covid-19 global pandemic)			
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According to the Baltimore Public Safety Accountability Dashboard², as of February 16, 2026, there have been 13 homicides in Baltimore City in 2026, down from 14 as of the same time last year, and non-fatal shootings at 31, up from 30. Though an outcomes assessment has not been conducted to determine what efforts have had the greatest impact on these year-over-year successes, building out the HVIP and CVI ecosystem³ and providing direct services to victims of gun violence have been components of the strategy to reduce gun violence since 2020, when the homicide and shooting rates were at their highest.⁴ **To sustain this downward trend, it is essential to continue ALL these efforts with additional supports for violence intervention professionals and victim rights advocates so they can remain actively engaged in these efforts.**⁵

The role of the “credible messenger” at CVI programs is to reach out directly to those in their communities who are at highest risk of causing or receiving harm from a gun, and of HVIPs is to provide support immediately after violent injury making that initial connection while the person shot is still at the hospital. Both CVI and HVIP programming are evidence-based. Victims’ “services for gun violence survivors are also a critical component of gun violence prevention, because one of the strongest predictors of future violence for young people is surviving it. In order to interrupt this cycle and facilitate physical and emotional healing, survivors need short- and long-term wraparound services. Meeting the needs of survivors furthers community healing and can stop the perpetuation of gun violence. Local, state, and federal policymakers should support the community-led programs that provide care and are filling these gaps and limiting further violence in their community.”¹ Additionally, “[w]hen survivors receive consistent support, trust in public institutions grows, cooperation improves, and communities are better positioned to interrupt cycles of violence. **Victim services are not peripheral to public safety, they are foundational to it.**”²

ROAR is the recipient of a small VIPP grant in FY26, which has allowed us to launch a wellness/mental health series specifically for the CVI and HVIP violence intervention specialists in Baltimore City. If this the total funding for VIPP was increased, ROAR would be able to apply for additional funding to expand this next program, as well as to support our on-going victims’ services support for some of the most underserved victims of crime: survivors of non-fatal gun shots.

Federal funding for all these evidence-based and successful programs have been dramatically cut in 2025-26. From 2021-22, the field of gun violence prevention and intervention has received significant investments in Baltimore City – and cities across the US – due to funding provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in 2021 and the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act of

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/report/new-version-community-led-services-for-survivors/>

² https://www.americanprogress.org/article/delivering-accountability-a-plan-to-stop-crime-in-our-communities/?utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANqtz--NvGJtm-0RJM07HwQLDej_J0qsBwq-Q5GgdD21yncX5SDUDkZzS_399tXEQ8hIH7cKx7E-M6YXE5OU2KOsjEVOHUqg&hsmi=403466888&utm_content=403466888&utm_source=hs_email

2022³. However, ARPA funds have mostly been spent and in April 2025 the Trump Administration rescinded over \$800 million of grants already awarded for gun violence prevention. The revised RFP for this funding, released earlier this year, has limiting language of who can be served with this funding that will significantly undercut the veracity of CVI and HVIP programs across the US, so even though the US DOJ is currently touting that the funding has been restored, that is a fallacy. The General Assembly is very aware of the erosion of funding for victims' services over the last decade. **This bill would increase an essential source of funding that support these life-saving and life-changing services that have been so critical in driving down the intolerably high rates of gun violence in MD.**

For all these reason, Lydia Watts, Executive Director of the ROAR Center at University of Maryland, Baltimore urges the House Judiciary Committee to support HB987.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lydia Watts". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the typed name and title.

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³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Bipartisan-Safer-Communities-Act-SAP-1.pdf>

