MCVRC
Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Continuing the Missions of the Stephanie Roper Committee and Foundation, Inc.

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FAVORBALE WITH AMENDMENTS – HB 868

Dear Chair Wilkins and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center (MCVRC) respectfully submits this letter in **support of House Bill 868 with amendments**. We commend the sponsor for recognizing that education is one of the most powerful tools available to prevent violence, shape decision-making, and help young people understand the lasting consequences of criminal behavior.

Requiring instruction for middle school students about the consequences of felony murder is an important and forward-thinking step. However, if this legislation is intended to meaningfully prevent violence, its reach and content should be strengthened. With targeted amendments, HB 868 can move beyond awareness and become a truly transformative prevention strategy.

Amendment 1: Apply the Instruction Statewide

As drafted, HB 868 applies only to Baltimore City. While Baltimore City has experienced significant violence, the impact of homicide and serious crime is felt across Maryland. Families and communities in every region experience devastating loss, trauma, and long-term instability as a result of violent crime.

Prevention education should not be geographically limited when the risks and consequences are statewide. Young people everywhere face conflicts and decision-making moments that can permanently alter lives — their own and others'.

A prevention initiative of this significance should therefore be implemented **statewide in all public middle schools**. Every Maryland student deserves access to education that promotes accountability, awareness, and informed decision-making. Expanding this bill statewide would ensure consistency, equity, and meaningful impact.

Amendment 2: Expand Instruction Beyond Legal Penalties

HB 868 appropriately focuses on the legal consequences of felony murder. But legal penalties alone do not capture the full reality of violent crime.

Young people must also understand the **human consequences** — the trauma, grief, and permanent harm violence inflicts on victims, families, offenders, and entire communities. A conviction represents only one dimension of the impact. The emotional devastation, fractured families, lifelong psychological injury, and community disruption that follow violence are equally real and enduring.

MCVRC works daily with families whose lives have been permanently changed by homicide and violent crime. Parents bury children. Children grow up without parents. Siblings and extended families live with lifelong grief and trauma. These consequences do not end with sentencing — they continue for generations.

One mother we work with lost her teenage son to a shooting that began as an argument between young people. She often says the hardest part is not the trial, or even the sentencing — it is the ordinary moments that never come back. His bedroom is still the same. She still buys his favorite snacks without thinking. Every holiday is marked by the empty chair at the table.

She once told us, “People talk about consequences like they end with prison. But my sentence never ends.”

That is the reality homicide survivor families live with — not for years, but for lifetimes.

Prevention education must make clear that violence does not simply result in punishment. It creates irreversible harm that extends far beyond the person who commits the act.

Instruction should therefore include:

- The emotional and psychological impact on victims and surviving families
- The long-term effects on offenders and their families
- Community-wide ripple effects of violence
- Trauma, grief, and loss
- The role of empathy, accountability, and responsibility

Education that addresses both legal and human consequences is far more likely to influence behavior and prevent harm.

Amendment 3: Survivor-Centered Educational Engagement

MCVRC strongly recommends incorporating structured opportunities for survivors of violent crime to share their lived experiences with students.

Personal testimony is one of the most powerful tools for prevention. When young people hear directly from individuals whose lives have been permanently changed by violence, consequences become real and human.

This model is well established. Organizations such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) have demonstrated that survivor-based education can shift attitudes, influence decision-making, and prevent tragedy. Hearing firsthand accounts has helped generations understand the real impact of impaired driving.

Maryland can apply the same evidence-based approach to violence prevention.

We recommend supporting programs that include:

- Survivor and surviving family member presentations
- Trauma-informed preparation and structure
- Partnerships with victim service organizations
- Curriculum integration reinforcing lived experience

Real stories carry a weight that traditional instruction cannot replicate.

Amendment 4: Create a Transformative Violence-Prevention Educational Model

Maryland has an opportunity not only to educate, but to lead. HB 868 can serve as the foundation for a comprehensive violence-prevention model that helps interrupt cycles of harm and reshape social norms.

While Maryland's circumstances are very different, Rwanda provides a powerful example of how education can be intentionally designed to prevent future violence. Following the 1994 genocide, Rwanda restructured its education system to promote unity, empathy, and accountability. Curriculum was redesigned to address the causes and consequences of violence, integrate peace and citizenship education across subjects, and engage communities in reinforcing these values beyond the classroom.

The lesson is not the scale of violence, but the power of education to shape social norms and break cycles of harm. Rwanda demonstrates what is possible when education is used deliberately as a prevention tool.

Maryland can adopt this prevention-focused approach by ensuring violence-prevention education:

- Promotes empathy and accountability
- Addresses causes and consequences of violence

- Engages families and communities
- Is inclusive and accessible
- Reinforces respect for human life

This is not simply about informing students of penalties. It is about cultivating a culture that understands the true cost of violence and rejects it.

Why This Matters

Every act of serious violence leaves a permanent wake of suffering that extends across families, communities, and generations. Prevention must occur before a young person makes a life-altering decision.

Education that is honest, human, and transformative can change behavior and reshape norms. If Maryland is committed to reducing violence, young people must understand not only what the law says — but what violence does.

Conclusion

MCVRC strongly supports the intent of House Bill 868 and applauds the recognition that education is a powerful violence-prevention tool. With amendments to:

1. Expand the program statewide
2. Address the full human impact of violent crime
3. Incorporate survivor engagement
4. Establish a prevention-focused educational framework

this legislation can become a meaningful and lasting investment in safer communities across Maryland.

We respectfully urge a **favorable report with amendments**.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to the safety and well-being of Maryland's children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

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