

May 5, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan  
*Governor*  
State of Maryland  
State House  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs (VIPP) Funding

Governor Hogan,

Thank you for your strong leadership in response to the COVID-19 crisis in our state. We appreciate your actions to prevent the spread of the virus and save lives. At the same time, gun violence continues to plague our communities and destroy lives. As you've publicly recognized, community-based violence reduction strategies like Baltimore's Safe Streets program and Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs), are an essential part of the solution. During this time of crisis, violence intervention teams are working around the clock to both keep the peace *and* prevent the spread of coronavirus in some of Maryland's most vulnerable communities. We know your administration is facing difficult budgetary decisions, but it is vital that we protect our communities by supporting proven public health approaches to reducing violence.

We urge you to sign SB 708 and release critical funds to support Baltimore's Safe Streets program and the statewide Maryland Violence Intervention and Prevention Program (VIPP) The MD VIPP is specifically designed to support the continuation and expansion of evidence-based public health strategies to address the epidemic of violence. The current COVID-19 pandemic underscores the need for more robust public health strategies to effectively address public health crises in our communities, including violence. You've publicly recognized the merits of life-saving local programs like Safe Streets and Hospital-based Intervention Programs. SB 708 is an update to programing that you signed into law two years ago. Now it's more important than ever that we adequately fund these programs.

While overall crime may be down in cities like Baltimore, gun violence continues to devastate Maryland families and communities during this crisis. In addition to spreading anti-violence messages, the staff and volunteers of local violence intervention programs are trusted messengers, communicating public health information about the virus, encouraging social distancing, and connecting those at the greatest risk of both violence and COVID-19 to critical resources. They perform a role that cannot easily be replicated by more traditional public health sources.

Safe Streets Baltimore, one of the programs previously funded by the MD VIPP Fund, has been proven to reduce violence when properly resourced. Since Mayor Young declared a state of emergency in Baltimore City on March 18<sup>th</sup>, Safe Streets alone has:

- Mediated 248 potentially violent conflicts
- Hosted 56 socially distanced resource giveaways of food, hygiene products, cleaning supplies, diapers and formula, etc.
- Continued to work individually with 17 high-risk participants to provide case management and support

Safe Streets is just one example of the critical work being done by violence prevention and intervention programs in communities across Maryland. Every day you delay in signing SB 708 and releasing the funds to violence prevention and intervention programs is one more day of preventable deaths and trauma in our most vulnerable communities. Gun violence in America is an epidemic, and Maryland is not immune. However, we have evidence-based strategies that will mitigate this crisis. Local violence interruption programs are a proven and cost-effective approach to reducing violence and saving lives. Please help us protect our most vulnerable neighbors by signing SB 708.

**Sincerely,**

Advocates for Children and Youth  
 Baltimore Child Abuse Center  
 Baltimore Police Department  
 Baltimore Women United  
 Brady: United Against Gun Violence  
 Brady: United Against Gun Violence, Maryland  
 Child First Authority  
 Cities United  
 Coalition to Stop Gun Violence  
 Community Justice Action Fund  
 Consulting Anthropologists  
 Critical Issues Forum  
 Cure Violence Global  
 Daniel Webster, Director of Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research  
 Equal Justice USA  
 Everytown for Gun Safety  
 Family Crisis Center of Baltimore County  
 Giffords: Courage to Fight Gun Violence  
 The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (**HAVI**)  
 Interfaith Action for Human Rights  
 Jews United for Justice  
 John King, MPGV board member and the 10th U.S. Secretary of Education (Obama Administration)  
 Kent County Citizens to Prevent Gun Violence  
 Kevin L. Cooper Foundation  
 Ladd Everitt  
 March For Our Lives MD

Maryland Chapter, America Academy of Pediatrics  
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence  
National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform  
National Network for Safe Communities  
Newtown Action Alliance  
Prevent Gun Violence Ministry of River Road UUC  
Rebuild, Overcome and Rise (ROAR) Center at UMB  
Reproductive Justice Inside  
ROCA Baltimore  
Thomas Abt, Senior Fellow, Council on Criminal Justice  
Transformative Research and Applied Violence Intervention Lab (TRAVAIL at UMCP)  
Urban Peace Institute  
Woodie Kessel, MD, MPH; Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS, (Ret)