



HB 666-Support
Reverend Greta Willis
The Kevin L Cooper Foundation
and
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence
House Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 26, 2020

Dear Chairman, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee,

As a mother who lost two teenage sons ...one to a car accident and the other to gun violence, I now dedicate my time and efforts to helping children who have experienced loss through a group therapy program operated at a Baltimore City elementary school. My son, Kevin, was a 14-year-old child dealing with the sudden loss of his 16-year-old brother. He was struggling. I didn't know how to help him and I turned to the police for help. They shot and killed him in our home. We need to do more to help children who suffer from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). **I urge the committee to vote FAVORABLY on House Bill 666 – Workgroup on Screening Related to Adverse Childhood Experiences.**

Experts in the field of violence reduction know that trauma is a driving force behind much of the everyday violence in this country and especially in our cities. As Thomas Abt states in his book, *Bleeding Out*, "It is hard to overstate the salience and ubiquity of trauma when you work in the field of violence prevention. It touches everything and everyone."

A large body of research has found that youth who suffer from chronic exposure to violence are 32 times more likely to become violence offenders. Abt further explains, "[w]hen threatened, the body releases large amounts of adrenaline and cortisol, causing people to react immediately with a "fight-flight-freeze" response. After the threat is gone, their bodies return to normal, but when this stress response is activated too frequently or for long periods of time, it can take a significant toll on the mind and body. When children perceive life to be generally, not just occasionally, dangerous, their brains stay on alert, continuously flooding their bodies with stress hormones." The long-term damage caused by a childhood filled with this kind of violence is well-documented. Experiencing trauma in childhood is strongly associated with delinquent, criminal, and violent behavior in adolescence and adulthood.

Adequately and early approaching children who have been exposed to these life altering events with trauma-informed care is a critical component to helping them to fight the above statistics which in turn is critical to stopping the cycle of violence affecting our communities. Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) is a well-supported method for treating children and youth who have suffered one or more traumatic experiences. The treatment combines CBT with traditional therapies to allow children to talk about their experiences in a supportive environment and involves teaching parents/caregivers' necessary skills to support the child's treatment.

The Workgroup proposed by this legislation is a first step toward developing an approach to adequately addressing the needs of children who suffer from the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences. **We urge a FAVORABLE report on HB 666 – Workgroup on Screening Related to Adverse Childhood Experiences.**