

A LIFE BRIDGE HEALTH GROUP

CENTER FOR HOPE

Advancing hope, healing and resilience



HB343- Family Law - Nonpayment of Child Support - Sentencing

House Judiciary Committee – January 14, 2021

Testimony of Joyce Lombardi, Director of Government Relations and Legal Services, Center for Hope

Position: **SUPPORT**

I write in support of HB343. The Center for Hope, a subsidiary of Life Bridge, is a comprehensive violence program that addresses violence through the lifespan, and includes child advocacy, domestic violence programs, street violence interruption programs and an elder abuse program

This bill would require that sentences for nonpayment of child support run concurrently, not consecutively. It still penalizes some parents for criminal failure to pay child support, but it removes the undue burden caused by consecutive sentences. Overly burdensome child support obligations are one of the impediments blocking some of our street violence clients from joining the local economy. Incarcerating parents for consecutive terms arguably does not support the very families and children that child support penalties are designed to help.

The Center for Hope includes several community violence programs, including a hospital-based violence intervention program, which uses skilled hospital responders to engage patients treated for street violence-related injuries, such as gunshot wounds and stabbings, and offers follow-up workforce development opportunities, support and referrals after discharge. The hospital response program adheres to the evidence-based, nationally known, Cure Violence model, which requires collaborating with Baltimore Safe Streets and other service programs and providing social services for violence victims and their families.

Since inception, Sinai's hospital responders have assisted over 360 shooting/stabbing/street violence patients whose injuries were serious enough to be admitted to the hospital. These patients are predominantly male (90 percent) aged 18-82, with the vast majority between 25-40. Of 114 patients that the hospital response program assisted between June 2018 and July 2019, over 92% AVOIDED violent activity that came to the attention of law enforcement within 6 months of being discharged and 98% avoided being re-admitted to Sinai for an additional violence-related injury. Our programs work.

Last session, our Community Violence program manager testified in Annapolis about a young father who graduated from the program and found work in the local economy. But past child support debt accrued during his incarceration proved unmanageable and he re-joined the underground economy to help pay staggering costs. Within a year, he became another victim of the gunshot violence that traumatizes Baltimore.

For all of the heretofore stated reasons, we request a **FAVORABLE** report for HB343.

Joyce Lombardi, Esq., Director of Government Relations and Legal Services (443) 923-7005