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April 2, 2019

The Honorable Reginald Jones-Sawyer, Jr.
Chair, Public Safety Committee
California State Assembly
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for AB 1603 (Wicks) – The Break the Cycle of Violence Act

Dear Chairman Jones-Sawyer,

The organizations jointly submitting this letter urge you to support AB 1603 (Wicks), the Break the Cycle of Violence Act. This legislation will strengthen the California Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) grant program, which provides critical support for evidence-based violence reduction initiatives in communities across our state.

All of our organizations have made it a top priority to advocate for the Legislature to increase and strengthen California's investment in programs that work to interrupt cycles of community violence, injury, trauma, and retaliation. Other states, especially New York and Massachusetts, have achieved remarkable reductions in violence by both strengthening their gun safety laws and committing significant ongoing funding to effectively targeted violence prevention grant programs in their communities. The CalVIP grant program, administered by the Board for State and Community Corrections (BSCC), provides competitive grants to cities and nonprofit organizations in California that implement effective violence reduction initiatives, and is California's only dedicated source of state funding for these initiatives.

AB 1603 (Wicks) would establish the California Violence Intervention and Prevention (CalVIP) grant program in statute for the first time, and would help guarantee that these funds are used as justly and effectively as possible by ensuring that resources are targeted on the most impactful programs in communities with the greatest need.

Background: Evolution from CalGRIP to CalVIP

From 2007 to 2017, California's Budget Acts appropriated approximately \$9 million per year to operate the California Gang Reduction, Intervention, and Prevention (CalGRIP) grant

program, which provided matching grants to cities for initiatives to reduce youth and gang-related crime. Many, though not all, CalGRIP grantees used these funds to implement effective, evidence-based violence reduction initiatives in their communities. With your leadership, in 2017, the Legislature acted to transform the CalGRIP program into CalVIP, shifting grant funding away from sometimes unfocused initiatives targeting gang affiliation and toward a more objective and effective focus on evidence-based violence reduction initiatives.

Legislators also acted to (1) direct CalVIP grants to localities with the highest rates of violence; (2) require CalVIP grantees to set clear, quantifiable goals for their program, and report on their progress in meeting those goals; and (3) ensure community-based organizations may apply directly for CalVIP grants. These changes worked to direct more funds to the most effective programs.

AB 1603 would continue this effort to strengthen CalVIP's requirements and ensure that California continues to effectively invest this limited grant funding as effectively as possible.

CalVIP's Impact

In recent years, CalVIP has leveraged state dollars and local funding matches to support some of the most effective and innovative gun violence reduction initiatives in the nation. These success stories include:

- **Los Angeles:** CalVIP helps fund the Mayor's Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD), which is part of a coordinated, citywide strategy to address serious violence. **Los Angeles has seen a more than 34% reduction in homicidesⁱ and a more than 44% reduction in nonfatal shootings since launching GRYD in 2007.**ⁱⁱ A 2015 report by the Urban Institute found that recipients of GRYD violence prevention services reported significant reductions in violent behaviors,ⁱⁱⁱ and a March 2017 assessment by researchers at Cal State University, Los Angeles found that GRYD incident response teams—just one of many GRYD programs—had prevented an estimated 185 gang retaliations citywide from 2014-15, resulting in estimated savings of \$110.2 million over two years.^{iv} In 2018, Los Angeles had its second-lowest number of homicides in more than 50 years.^v
- **Oakland:** CalVIP helps fund Oakland Ceasefire, the city's primary strategy for addressing serious violence by intervening with the small population of individuals at highest risk of engaging in violent behavior. **Since launching the strategy in 2012, Oakland has seen a nearly 50% decline in homicides and a more than 50% drop in non-fatal shootings.**^{vi} Last year, Oakland experienced its lowest number of homicides in almost two decades.^{vii} Independent evaluators from Northeastern University credited Oakland Ceasefire with reducing gun homicides by 31.5%.^{viii}
- **Richmond:** CalVIP helps fund the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), an innovative city agency dedicated exclusively to the prevention of violence. **Richmond has seen an almost 80% reduction in homicides^{ix} and a 76% reduction in nonfatal shootings since launching ONS in 2007.**^x One of its primary strategies, an intensive, long-term mentoring program for high-risk individuals known as the Peacemaker Fellowship, is now being replicated in both Stockton and Sacramento, with support from CalVIP.

- **Stockton and Sacramento:** Stockton and Sacramento are two of the newest recipients of grants from the revamped CalVIP program, and are using funding to pursue strategies similar to those in place in Richmond, Oakland, and Los Angeles. **Stockton experienced a 40% reduction in homicides and a 31% decline in nonfatal shootings from 2017 to 2018.**^{xii} In Sacramento, homicides are down 7% from 2017 to 2018, and last year, no one under the age of 18 was murdered in the city for the first time in 35 years.^{xiii}

These cities have demonstrated that targeted investments in programs focused on interrupting cycles of gun violence can achieve large and sustained reductions in violence in a short period of time.

How AB 1603 (Wicks) Would Strengthen CalVIP

The Break the Cycle of Violence Act, AB 1603, would authorize the CalVIP grant program by statute, and ensure that this funding continues to be used for the most targeted and effective programs in communities with the greatest need for additional violence prevention resources. It would do so by:

1. Removing harmfully low caps on CalVIP awards: Last year, Budget Act language effectively capped competitive CalVIP awards at \$250,000 per year (\$500 thousand over a two-year period), no matter how large a community's population or its rates of violence. Removing these award caps would allow BSCC to choose to award larger grants where appropriate. This would be especially important if the Legislature grants our coalition's budget request to increase this program's funding. AB 1603 would authorize BSCC to make more sustained and meaningful investments, where appropriate, in the communities and programs that need these resources most.
2. Narrowing CalVIP's focus to programs that demonstrate the greatest likelihood of reducing community violence: While nearly all CalVIP grantees have focused on programs that seek to interrupt cycles of community violence, BSCC has raised some questions about whether CalVIP grants should also be used to fund programs that address other forms of violence, such as school bullying. We believe those are worthy but substantively different programs that should be funded through alternate, existing funding streams. AB 1603 would ensure that the very limited funding California has invested in CalVIP remains targeted at programs with a common purpose: interrupting cycles of homicides, shootings, and aggravated assaults in the community.
3. Targeting CalVIP resources on programs that provide intervention services to individuals at highest risk of being victims or perpetrators of violence in the near future: Programs that focus services and resources on a relatively small number of individuals who are at high-risk, as opposed to entire communities, have the strongest evidence-base and demonstrated impact. AB 1603 would ensure that CalVIP resources are primarily targeted at programs such as hospital-based violence intervention programs, evidence-based street outreach programs like Advance Peace, and focused deterrence strategies like Operation Ceasefire, that have demonstrated effectiveness at breaking cycles of violence among this highest-risk population.

4. **Strengthening CalVIP's eligibility requirements to focus resources on communities that have the highest rates and numbers of homicides:** Previous Budget Act language appropriately directed BSCC to award CalVIP funds to communities that are “disproportionately impacted by violence.” BSCC has interpreted this to mean the cities with the highest rates of violence in a single (most recent) year. AB 1603 would provide more specific eligibility requirements to target CalVIP resources in communities that have the highest rates and numbers of homicides over multiple years, or that otherwise demonstrate a unique and compelling need for additional resources to address community violence.
5. **Requiring CalVIP to invest in initiatives that do not contribute to mass incarceration:** The most effective violence reduction initiatives treat violence as a preventable public health issue that can be addressed with targeted interventions and narrowly focused, procedurally just deterrence strategies. AB 1603 would ensure that CalVIP does not fund unfocused and inequitable suppression strategies.
6. **Requiring city grantees to distribute at least half their CalVIP award to community-based organizations and/or public agencies that are not law enforcement agencies but are primarily dedicated to community safety:** AB 1603 would ensure that city grantees develop meaningful partnerships with community-based service providers and/or use these funds to establish dedicated public agencies, like Richmond’s Office of Neighborhood Safety, that are focused on preventing violence by providing targeted outreach and social services.
7. **Requiring BSCC to seek input, in awarding CalVIP grants, from people who have been directly impacted by violence, formerly incarcerated individuals, and people with experience implementing violence reduction initiatives:** In recent years, the Executive Steering Committee advising BSCC on CalVIP awards has included a diverse array of individuals with important lived perspectives about how to justly and effectively interrupt cycles of violence in their communities. AB 1603 would ensure that BSCC continues to include these needed perspectives in administering the CalVIP program.

By increasing California’s investment in the CalVIP program and enacting AB 1603 (Wicks), you will ensure that CalVIP continues to support and replicate some of the nation’s most innovative and effective efforts to prevent the loss of human life. **AB 1603 will ensure that CalVIP funds are used justly and effectively, and will help make California a national model in efforts to treat violence as a preventable public health issue.**

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to support AB 1603 (Wicks).

Sincerely,

Ari Freilich, **Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence**

Mayor Michael D. Tubbs, **City of Stockton**

DeVone Boggan, **Advance Peace**

Marc Philpart, **Alliance for Boys and Men of Color**

Amanda Wilcox, **Brady California United Against Gun Violence**

Vaughn Crandall and Reygan Harmon, **California Partnership for Safe Communities**

Lee Winkelman, Rabbi Julie Saxe-Teller, and Ben Ginsburg, **California Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**

Shimica Gaskins, **Children's Defense Fund-California**

Mirel Herrera, **Community Justice Action Fund**

Gary Slutkin, MD, **Cure Violence**

Emily Harris, **Ella Baker Center for Human Rights**

Jacqueline Caster, **Everychild Foundation**

Emily Walton, **Everytown for Gun Safety**

Rev. Michael McBride, **Faith in Action**

Javier Stauring, **Healing Dialogue and Action**

Maria "Lou" Calanche, **Legacy LA**

Israel Villa, **MILPA**

Sarah Green, **National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, Los Angeles**

David Muhammad, **National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform**

Sue Burrell, **Pacific Juvenile Defender Center**

DeAngelo Mack, **Public Health Advocates**

Rashna F. Ginwalla, MD, MPH, FACS, **San Joaquin General Hospital**

Darlene Kiyan, **Toberman Neighborhood Center**

Fernando Rejon, **Urban Peace Institute**

Anne Marks, **YouthAlive!**

Anthony Smith, **Cities United**

ⁱ Homicide reduction from 2007-2018. Los Angeles Police Department, “Crimes & Initiatives, 2018,” <http://assets.lapdonline.org/assets/pdf/2018%20Crimes%20and%20Initiatives.pdf>, accessed March 25, 2019.

ⁱⁱ Reduction in nonfatal shootings from 2007-2017. Los Angeles Police Department, “Crimes & Initiatives, 2017-2018,” <http://assets.lapdonline.org/assets/pdf/2017%20LAPD%20Crime%20and%20Initiatives.pdf>, accessed March 25, 2019.

ⁱⁱⁱ Meaghan Cahill, et al, “Evaluation of the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development Program: Year 4 Evaluation Report,” Urban Institute, 35-37 (Sept. 2015), at <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/77956/2000622-Evaluation-of-the-Los-Angeles-Gang-Reduction-and-Youth-Development-Program-Year-4-Evaluation-Report.pdf>.

^{iv} P. Jeffrey Brantingham, et al, “GRYD Intervention Incident Response & Gang Crime,” GRYD Research and Evaluation Team, 23 (Mar. 30, 2017), at https://www.lagryd.org/sites/default/files/reports/GRYD%20IR%20and%20Gang%20Crime%20Report_2017_FINALv2_0.pdf.

^v Karen Wynter, “Crime Is Down in Los Angeles Across Every Major Category, Latest Statistics Show,” KTLA5, January 28, 2019, <https://ktla.com/2019/01/28/crime-down-in-l-a-across-every-major-category-for-2018-one-of-the-safest-times-to-live-in-los-angeles-police-chief-says>.

^{vi} Calculated from OPD Annual Crime Reports. Oakland Police Department, City of Oakland, Crime Incident Data Reports: Annual and Quarterly Crime Reports, 2012-2018, <https://app.box.com/s/icb4flrew3pdwtlh9apirnae2x79vs9c/file/376923787621>.

^{vii} City of Oakland, “Oakland Records Lowest Homicide Total Since 1999,” January 3, 2019, <https://www.oaklandca.gov/news/2019/oakland-records-lowest-homicide-total-since-1999>.

^{viii} Anthony A. Braga et al., “Oakland Ceasefire Impact Evaluation: Key Findings,” Northwestern University, August 10, 2018, https://p.eastbayexpress.com/media/pdf/oakland_ceasefire_impact_evaluation_key_findings.pdf; Darwin BondGraham, “Study Finds Significant Reduction in Gun Homicides in Oakland Via Ceasefire Strategy,” East Bay Express, August 22, 2018, <https://www.eastbayexpress.com/SevenDays/archives/2018/08/22/study-finds-significant-reduction-in-gun-homicides-in-oakland-via-ceasefire-strategy>.

^{ix} Federal Bureau of Investigation, US Department of Justice, Uniform crime reporting program data: Offenses Known to Law Enforcement, Table 8, 2007-2017, <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u-s>.

^x Data provided by Richmond Office of Neighborhood Safety.

^{xi} Matthew Nuttle, “Police: Homicides down 40 percent in Stockton,” ABC 10 News (Jan. 2, 2019), at <https://www.abc10.com/article/news/crime/police-homicides-down-40-percent-in-stockton/103-04c09461-955d-463e-b9f5-70af8cc751cc>.

^{xii} WMC5, “For the First Time in 35 years, No Children Were Murdered in Sacramento, CA, Last Year” (Jan. 23, 2019), at <http://www.wmcactionnews5.com/2019/01/23/first-time-years-no-children-were-murdered-sacramento-ca-last-year>.