



PREVENTING VIOLENCE
AND DEVELOPING
YOUTH LEADERS

YOUTH ALIVE!
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July 29, 2019

Honorable Anthony J. Portantino
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
California State Capitol, Room 3086
Sacramento, CA 95814

**HONORARY
ADVISORY COUNCIL**

HON. DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator

EDWARD JAMES OLMOS
Actor

HON. BARBARA LEE
United States Representative

Re: Assembly Bill 656 (Garcia) - Support

Dear Senator Portantino,

On behalf of Youth ALIVE!, Oakland’s anchor organization for violence prevention, intervention and healing, we want to reiterate our support of Assembly Bill 656 (Garcia) to establish the Office of Healthy and Safe Communities in California.

California is drastically behind when it comes to funding and coordinating effective solutions that end cycles of violence, promote healing, and build safety. Additionally, existing funding streams and policies respond to violence primarily through the criminal legal and child welfare systems in a reactionary fashion, rather than a preventative one.

Through the creation of the Office of Healthy and Safe Communities (OHSC), California has an opportunity to advance a bold paradigm shift in violence prevention by emphasizing asset-based empowerment approaches to peacemaking, restorative justice, healing and safety, and advancing community prevention and intervention strategies that heal and restore people and ensure all communities are full of the opportunities necessary for their residents to thrive and be well.

Youth ALIVE!’s Caught in the Crossfire program, founded by Sherman Spears, was the very first hospital-based violence intervention program (HVIP). This program is now a federally recognized best practice, and a proven model that has been replicated in dozens of cities across California and other parts of the United States, as well as abroad.

Nationally, some studies have shown that, without intervention, as many as 44% of violently injured patients will return to medical care for a subsequent injury. It is irresponsible, immoral, and expensive to discharge violently injured patients without providing them with the appropriate aftercare to heal and remain injury-free – which is what HVIPs provide. While modern medicine has saved countless lives from violent injuries, most healthcare systems routinely fail to address violently injured patients’ risk of re-injury after these patients exit the hospital. This creates a revolving door of violent injury and trauma centers too often see the same victims repeatedly.

Hospital-based Violence Intervention Programs (HVIPs) use innovative and effective patient-focused strategies to break that cycle and reduce rates for violent injury recidivism. Evaluations have repeatedly demonstrated that integrating HVIP services into hospital trauma centers corresponds with large reductions in rates of injury recidivism and long-term increases in patients’ wellbeing. Yet, California lacks a coordinating body focused on

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uplifting and implementing these best practices around the state to proactively address violence throughout our communities.

The OHSC, which would be housed under the purview of the California Department of Public Health, would fulfill that coordinating role in California. The Governor would identify and appoint a Director of OHSC to carry out the following responsibilities:

- Assemble a staff team and an advisory committee
- Develop, implement, and monitor a California vision and plan for violence prevention, safety, and healing
- Establish and manage a statewide community of practice for leaders working on these issues throughout California
- Strengthen and professionalize community violence intervention and prevention as a licensed occupation
- Steward alignment, coordination, and synergy across statewide departments and agencies

The OHSC will seek to outline a vision for healing, justice, safety, and peace that utilizes the research and evidence from the fields of human and youth development, public health, and community building. Practices that are trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, community centered, and utilize a social determinants of health framework that acknowledges generational trauma, the legacy of sexism, racism, and colonialism are the most effective way to reduce and end violence and promote peace, healing, and safety.

In order for California to stop cycles of violence, a prevention-oriented approach with inter-connected and coordinated strategies, and equitable funding for individuals and communities with the greatest need is required.

For these reasons, Youth ALIVE! supports AB 656, and we respectfully ask for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anne Marks", is written over a faint, light blue horizontal line.

Anne Marks
Executive Director