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We are Kalamazoo based and engage community members, stakeholders, and leaders in collaborative efforts to address the root causes of gun violence and advocate for policy reforms to address systemic racism and promote equity and justice for all communities.

In 2021 Kalamazoo declared gun violence a public health crisis and from that point until last June, the community came together to identify goals and strategies to create a plan to address gun violence in the long term. This plan is called the Kalamazoo Blueprint for Peace and includes recommendations to change how we respond to violent incidents and for community wide systems change like access to child care, housing and wealth building opportunities to prevent future violence. Some of the emergent response recommendations include: strengthening the capacity and funding of local violence interventionists, providing trauma informed care for the community after an incident, and developing hospital-community partnerships which provide wraparound social services to victims of violence.

Recent CVI grants from the state, whether through DHHS or the State Police, have been funded by one-time federal dollars. These opportunities have given transformative dollars to communities - but they cannot sustain the programs developed with these initial grants. Kalamazoo City and County funds committed are from ARPA. Municipal budgets and philanthropic opportunities come and go and can't sustain long-term strategies that are needed to prevent violence.

Michigan chose to plant and grow our CVI office in the department of health and human services for a reason. And the State must identify permanent resources to fund prevention and intervention strategies that can support a public health approach. I know there are other great ideas out there for how to fund violence prevention and we need to consider as many as we can.

Medicaid can be utilized as a permanent source of funding for community violence intervention and prevention programs - through two approaches - street outreach, like the programs you heard about today, where street outreach interventionist's time can be reimbursed by Medicaid and hospital-based interventions in which outreach workers connect with victims in order to reduce the likelihood of retaliation and provide outreach to witnesses and families after an incident to connect them to behavioral health and other social services. As a partner in developing the blueprint, our hospital system was an initial impetus for our organization looking into this issue.

California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, New York and Oregon have passed legislation allowing Medicaid to reimburse services involved in violence prevention. And Michigan can also implement Medicaid reimbursement without new legislation through administrative benefit services and waiver programs.

I am not a CVI or Medicaid expert, so I will leave any technical questions to the folks in the room who are - but I have experienced multiple instances of gun violence between 2014-2018 when my family lived in Chicago. I want to share with you one particular instance.

On a Friday evening in the fall of 2017, My husband and I were with our 4 year old son at a neighborhood bar that had a food truck outside every Friday night. Just after I brought our dinner inside, multiple shots fired. Staff ran outside and came back in and asked if anyone knew cpr. I'm a former lifeguard and lifelong Girl Scout. I made eye contact with my husband and told him I was going. He took our son into the single stall bathroom and locked the door. Outside there was nothing to be done, I saw a woman on the ground who had been shot in the face and a man was doing chest compressions. A friend of mine was standing there shirtless with blood all over his arms because he'd removed his tshirt to use it to stop the bleeding. I turned to my left and saw his wife and son inside a store, screaming and crying. Had the woman not been directly in front of my friends on the sidewalk, they likely would have been shot. Still today there are bullet indents in the metal siding of the storefront where they'd been standing. I pulled them out of the store, grabbed a new tshirt off the rack and we spent the rest of the evening - two couples and two young boys - in the back of the bar waiting for the police to clear us.

This event was catalyzing for our neighborhood - people rallied around the need for a direct response from the alderman, city, police and community programs that said that they were working to reduce gun violence in our community.

The following Monday morning I was in the office of a trained trauma therapist and my work gave me the week off, no questions asked. But the impact on my family has been unexpected. Last year in fourth grade, my son was asked to write a short story about a significant event in his life.

A Shooting in Chicago

By [REDACTED]

It was at night in a bar in Chicago. Cool music was playing. I was inside with my parents. First, a person came inside and said "There is a person outside with a gun." Next, I heard a loud bang. Then, my mom's friend went outside.

An old lady got shot. My mom's friend tried to stop the blood with his jacket. It did not work. The old lady was a kindergarten teacher. She died later that night. I hope I never experience anything like that ever again.

His details are fuzzy, but 5 years after the incident he wrote about it in school. And this was one event. One shooting. My family has access to therapy because we have private insurance.

Families and children that regularly witness violence or lose someone they know from shootings in their neighborhood need access to trauma-informed care, and Medicaid should be used to provide care for those who need it most and don't have it.

I am an advocate for my community and the Kalamazoo Blueprint for Peace is a plan with a public health approach that addresses upstream and downstream causes and impacts of violence that has focused our community on healing visible and unseen wounds, and Medicaid is one way to address the need for sustainable funding for programs and services we all know we need.

Thank you so much for your time.