



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

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Date: February 28th, 2020

Re: HB 464 - Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Position: SUPPORT

To: The Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here as a retired police officer and as a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP), a nonprofit group of police and prosecutors who speak from firsthand experience. We support the establishment of overdose prevention services programs (OPS) to prevent overdose deaths and improve public safety in our communities.

One great frustration for law enforcement is being called to deal with the same people day after day. One day, someone is using drugs in public and leaving syringes on the ground. The next day, officers are called because the person has overdosed. These calls overextend our limited resources, from patrol officers to ambulances and hospital beds.

Over 100 cities around the world prevent overdose deaths and police calls by establishing overdose prevention services programs (OPS).¹ OPS have been shown to reduce safety problems associated with drug use,² including public drug use,³ discarded syringes,⁴ and overdose deaths.⁵

Baltimore City desperately needs community members to trust police, and OPS are one way to start building this trust. If people do not trust police enough to share information with us, we can't gather the evidence we need to solve serious cases.

When was the last time that a person who uses drugs volunteered information to the police? In our city, people who use drugs hide from us. They do not report crimes that they witnessed, though they experience crime constantly. Establishing an OPS where they can use drugs safely would create a seismic shift in how they view public safety and public health

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professionals. Suddenly, we are not the enemy. We are part of a system that wants to save their lives. I believe that establishing overdose prevention sites would lead to more collaboration with police and greater safety for all on the street.

OPS also reduce the health risks for police officers. Research shows that OPS decrease HIV and Hepatitis C infections related to injection drug use.⁶ We all benefit when a needle in someone's pocket or on the sidewalk is less likely to transmit HIV. Officers benefit in particular, because we often have to reach into someone's bag or search through a trash can. I know officers who have been stuck by syringes, and they and their families suffered terrible stress while waiting to hear the results of their blood test.

In short, OPS are a common-sense next step to reduce overdose deaths and 911 calls. Our entire community will benefit from OPS, from our police officers and first responders to people who use drugs and people who see drug use in their community. As drug overdose deaths continue to cause tragedies for families across our state, it is time for Maryland to take the next step and allow the opening of OPS.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience in support of this bill.

Respectfully,

Major Mike Hilliard (Ret.)
Baltimore City Police Department
Speaker, Law Enforcement Action Partnership

1. "Drug consumption rooms: an overview of provision and evidence," (2015) <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/topics/pods/drug-consumption-rooms>.
2. C. Potier et al, "Supervised injection services: What has been demonstrated? A systematic literature review," *Drug Alcohol Depend* 118, no.2-3 (2011): 100-10.
3. Evan Wood, et al., "Changes in public order after the opening of a medically supervised safer injecting facility for illicit injection drug users," *CMAJ* 171(7) (2004): 731-734.
4. Steven Petrar et al., "Injection Drug Users' Perceptions Regarding Use of a Medically Supervised Safer Injecting Facility," *Journal of Addictive Behaviors* 32, no.5 (2007):1088-1093 .
5. Brandon D.L. Marshall et al., "Reduction in overdose mortality after the opening of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility: a retrospective population-based study," *Lancet* 377 (2011): 1429-37 .
6. Salaam Semaan et al., "Potential role of safer injection facilities in reducing HIV and Hepatitis C infections and overdose mortality in the United States," *Drug & Alcohol Dependence* 118 (2011): 100- 110.