

2/28/2020

**House Bill 464 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program
FAVORABLE**

Dear State Delegates,

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

I've had a very hard time figuring out what to say today, how much of myself to share and how much to make vulnerable. This is deeply personal to me.

My name is Christa Daring, I was born in Baltimore City in 1986, was raised in the 14th city council district, and currently reside in the 3rd. I am the Executive Director of SWOP-USA and a graduate of The Baltimore School for the Arts. I moved to Washington State in 2005 to acquire my Bachelor's Degree, and also intentionally to remove myself from a pattern of addiction and a social circle of overdose.

My history of opioid dependency is painfully typical, as a young athlete my injury was inevitable, but the over prescription of opioids was not.

I am not trying to evaluate the ways in which individuals develop substance use disorders. Substance use disorders are increasingly prevalent in our communities - across the country, and the gateway is sometimes over prescription, but as prevalent is a system of injustice and negligence that leaves vast majorities of our country under-treated for both physical, existential pain, and violence

It is correct to observe that the opioid epidemic was only labeled such as, when people who look like me became the "victims". I'm white and middle class presenting, despite coming from a working class background. Substance use disorders and overdose have long ravaged Baltimore and Maryland, while it is necessary that we are currently addressing it, we owe a great apology to the majority of the Baltimore City and Maryland population whose suffering has long been ignored in this crisis.

I have been sober from opioids for the fifteen years. I had the opportunity to leave Baltimore, and to change my context. When I moved to the Pacific Northwest opioids did not have the hold that they do now. However, within two years of moving to Washington State, one of my closest friends had overdosed twice, the final proving fatal, with his first and only with baby on the way.

I can barely answer the phone anymore, every time I see a call come in, especially when I recognize the number, I seize with anxiety. Since the age of 16, answering the phone requires that I briefly pause and accept that someone I know might be dead. These are preventable calls, not only that, they are preventable deaths.

There are too many of these stories for me to recount individually, people I have loved, people I have only known peripherally, but people I have lost, that we have lost. These losses and my own history made it a likely trajectory that I would enter harm reduction and first responder medicine. I have intervened in opioid overdoses more times than I count, I have administered Naloxone approximately 6 times, I have not lost a single patient, and I'm just a concerned citizen. How many people could Overdose Prevention Sites save?

In 2017, Baltimore City saw 761 drug and alcohol-related intoxication deaths, 692 of which were opioid-related.¹ The same year Baltimore City had 343 murders. We had more than two times as many opioid deaths than we had murders.

A statistic you're hopefully likely to read a lot, *The Lancet*² found that fatal overdoses dropped 30% in a single Vancouver, Canada, neighborhood served by such a facility. What if we could reduce our overall murder rate in Baltimore City by 30% just by opening a new community center? What reasonable argument could there be against that?

Overdose Prevention Sites are part of a mosaic of care, and as someone who provides direct support to those experiencing addiction and other struggles, meeting them where they are is essential to assisting in a road to recovery. The stigma of addiction and use continues to push folks out of reach of treatment and resources. Baltimore City and Maryland at large must commit to investing in patient centered and patient-led care around substance use disorders, and Overdose Prevention Sites are a crucial step in that continuum of care.

In April of 2019 a friend to many of us in the LGBTQ community in Baltimore, Brittany Fleming died of an overdose, and the compounding violence of white supremacy; transphobia; police harassment; and the criminalization of sex workers. We failed Brittany, and just as we have failed too many, this is our opportunity to honor those that we have lost, and help build a better future for many others.

Please join me in supporting Overdose Prevention Sites in Baltimore City and Maryland, for many of our residents - the time to do this has already run out.

¹ <https://health.baltimorecity.gov/opioid-overdose/baltimore-city-overdose-prevention-and-response-information>

² [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(10\)62353-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(10)62353-7/fulltext)