



On Our Own of Maryland, Inc.

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Testimony in Support of HB 464

Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

House of Delegates – Health and Government Operations

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On Our Own of Maryland is a statewide behavioral health consumer education and advocacy organization that has been in operation for more than 25 years. We are comprised of current or former recipients of mental health and substance use services and we represent 23 behavioral health peer-operated Wellness and Recovery Centers throughout Maryland. We are organized in order to improve access to competent, respectful, and effective recovery-based treatment, services, and supports, as well as to promote quality of life for everyone with behavioral health needs, especially for people who are underserved and marginalized. We provide training, technical assistance, and advocacy support to our statewide network of peer-run programs in an effort to ensure the sustainability of nonprofit entities that foster equality, autonomy and choice for behavioral health service recipients.

On Our Own of Maryland supports the goal of reducing the spread of disease and death from drug use while acknowledging that drug prohibition has been largely unsuccessful. Thus, we strongly support HB 464 and the creation of state-sanctioned safe places for individuals to come and use their previously obtained drugs under medical supervision. These sites would also provide clean needles, education around wound care, and counseling for those seeking recovery. Overdose prevention sites are essential harm reduction services because:

Overdose deaths in Maryland are up to three times higher than the national average. Maryland has one of the five highest rates of opioid-related overdose deaths in the nation.ⁱ The number of opioid-related overdose deaths in the state is increasing at statistically significant rates.ⁱⁱ Governor Hogan declared a state of emergency due to the opioid epidemic in 2017, but there has yet to be widespread improvement.ⁱⁱⁱ

Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Sites drastically decrease the transmission of infectious diseases and the number of overdose deaths in the surrounding areas.^{iv} Providing clean needles and injection education helps reduce infections and the spread of infections. Testing strips allow users to know whether their drugs contain Fentanyl, a powerful and dangerous synthetic form of heroin. A professional medical response to any possible overdose has led to no recorded deaths at any overdose prevention site world-wide.

Evidence shows that Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Sites do not increase drug use. Sites^v ^{vi} are associated with less public consumption of drugs and no increase in drug trafficking. In fact, studies suggest that these sites actually decrease drug use and increase connection to recovery services^{vii}, in part, by providing a controlled environment free of harassment, theft and assault.

Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Sites have been found to be extremely cost effective. A recent cost-benefit analysis indicated that in San Francisco, an overdose prevention site would save \$2.33 for every \$1 spent.^{viii} The study also indicated that an overdose prevention site would generate 3.5 million in savings annually. Public health dollar savings due to lack of transmitted infectious diseases and expensive ambulance responses to overdose cannot be understated.

On Our Own of Maryland strongly urges a favorable report on HB 464.

ⁱ National Institute on Drug Abuse. 2018. *Maryland opioid summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-summaries-by-state/maryland-opioid-summary>

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Donovan, D. 2018. *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved from <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/politics/bs-md-larry-hogan-overdose-deaths-20180928-story.html>

^{iv} Sherman et al., 2017.

^v Wood, E., Tyndall, M. W., Lai, C., Montaner, J. S., & Kerr, T. (2006). Impact of a medically supervised safer injecting facility on drug dealing and other drug-related crime. *Substance abuse treatment, prevention, and policy*, 1, 13. doi:10.1186/1747-597X-1-13

^{vi} Kinnard, E. N., Howe, C. J., Kerr, T., Hass, V. S., & Marshall, B. D. (2014). Self-reported changes in drug use behaviors and syringe disposal methods following the opening of a supervised injecting facility in Copenhagen, Denmark. *Harm reduction journal*, 11(1), 29. Retrieved from

<https://harmreductionjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1477-7517-11-29>

^{vii} Sherman, S., Hunter, K., & Rouhani, S. (2017). Safe drug consumption spaces: A strategy for Baltimore City. *The Abell Report*, 29, 7. Retrieved from

<https://www.abell.org/sites/default/files/files/Safe%20Drug%20Consumption%20Spaces%20final.pdf>

^{viii} Irwin, A., Jozaghi, E., Bluthenthal, R. N., & Kral, A. H. (2017). A cost-benefit analysis of a potential supervised injection facility in San Francisco, California, USA. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 47(2), 164-184.