



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

February 28, 2020

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

POSITION: SUPPORT

Delegate Hettleman, Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 464: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.

This legislation would authorize the establishment of an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program by a community-based organization to provide a place for the consumption of preobtained drugs, provide sterile needles, administer first aid, and provide certain other services; providing the Maryland Department of Health may approve not more than six programs, two programs in urban areas, two in suburban areas, and two in rural areas, to operate at a single location in areas with a high incidence of drug use; etc.

MRHA's mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland's land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland's 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

Maryland's rural communities have been hard hit by the opioid crisis. Harm reduction practices, while not a solution to the opioid crisis, have been proven to reduce morbidity and mortality. According to the CDC, syringe service programs reduce transmission of blood-borne and other infections among drug users. In addition, users of syringe service programs are five times more likely to enter treatment programs than those who do not use the programs.¹ Safe consumption sites are a harm reduction practice used worldwide. The sites have been shown to reduce needle sharing which reduces risk of HIV and Hepatitis transmission.² Evidence suggests that safe injection sites reduce public injections, overdoses and disposal of used needles.³

MRHA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

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¹ www.cdc.gov/ssp/syringe-services-programs-faq

² <https://www.bccsu.ca/blog/news-release/study-supervised-injection-site-reduces-hiv-risk-behaviour/>

³ [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(17\)30316-1/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(17)30316-1/fulltext)