



Mission: *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy*

Vision: *Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

HB464 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Hearing Date: 2/28/20

Committee: Health & Government Operations Committee

Position: SUPPORT

Thank you Delegate Pendergrass, Delegate Pena-Melnyk and all members of the Health & Government Operations Committee. We especially want to thank Senator Hettleman and co-sponsors for introducing this important public health legislation to establish a thoughtful program for overdose and infectious disease prevention in Maryland. We submit this testimony on behalf of the Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) to express our support for HB464: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.

Currently, Maryland and Washington D.C. rank as two of the top 5 states experiencing the most dramatic levels of drug overdose-related death rates in the country. There were 2,143 opioid-related deaths in Maryland in 2018 from prescriptions, synthetic opioids, and heroine (compared with 504 similar deaths in 2010). Drug use, especially with injections, also leads to more cases of HIV infection and hepatitis C (HepC). Though the General Assembly has taken valuable steps to address this epidemic, MdPHA agrees that more must be done to curb substance addiction, death, and the spread of related infectious disease.

Supervised facilities, like Overdose Prevention Sites (OPSs), where people with drug addiction can have immediate access to life saving medical care, while managing their addiction in a safe and legal setting, has proven to save lives. This is a critical way to give people non-judgmental therapeutic care and help them quit in a realistic way. This type of program has the potential to reduce the number of deaths from overdose significantly, reduce the spread of HIV and HepC, increase community safety, prevent unnecessary hospital and emergency room costs, and offer more people access to drug treatment and rehabilitation services. Canada, the Netherlands, and Switzerland have all found positive results from similar programs, as have cities like Philadelphia. One study found a 35% decrease in overdose deaths in the area around an OPS facility within one year of opening. Solutions like those outlined in HB464 are worth supporting.

The Maryland Public Health Association is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education efforts and advocacy of public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 150-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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