

Testimony of the Human Trafficking Prevention Project

BILL NO: House Bill 408
TITLE: Statewide Targeted Overdose Prevention (STOP) Act of 2022
COMMITTEE: Health and Government Operations
HEARING DATE: February 16, 2022
POSITION: SUPPORT

House Bill 408 would authorize certain emergency medical services providers to dispense naloxone to individuals who received treatment for a nonfatal drug overdose or were evaluated by a crisis evaluation team. It would also require certain community services programs, healthcare providers, and hospitals to have a protocol to dispense naloxone free of charge to people who they know have a substance use disorder or who are heightened risk of experiencing an overdose. The Human Trafficking Prevention Project supports this bill because it will reduce the risk of overdose for trafficking survivors who use drugs, many of whom do so to cope with the trauma of their trafficking experience.

Legislation passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2013 creating the state's Overdose Response Program (ORP). The main purpose of the ORP is to facilitate the widespread distribution of the life-saving overdose antidote, naloxone. While the program has grown over the years, the Center for Harm Reduction at the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) reports that many health care and human service agencies that provide services to people with opioid use disorders do not regularly distribute naloxone. This bill will require that a number of health care and other community service programs to dispense naloxone free of charge to people they know to have a substance use disorder or are at risk of experiencing an overdose.

This legislation that will reduce the harms that people using drugs face, many of whom are survivors of human trafficking, given that substance use is both a common predictor of, *and* a reaction to, this horrific crime. Many trafficking survivors report self-medicating to cope with past trauma and were trafficked as a direct result of this addiction, while those who have survived a trafficking experience often begin using substances as a means to cope with what has happened to them. These survivors are put at increased risk of overdose if they or the people around them or the programs they frequent do not have access to naloxone.

House Bill 408 will reduce this potential harm by requiring programs who most commonly come in contact with those who use drugs to provide naloxone free of charge to those with a known substance use disorder or who are at risk of an overdose. This commonsense bill will improve the health outcomes of all persons who use drugs, including trafficking survivors. For these reasons, the Human Trafficking Prevention Project at the University of Baltimore School of Law supports House Bill 408. We respectfully urge a favorable report.