



February 10, 2022

HB 837 – Cannabis Reform – Support with Amendments

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The companion to criminal record expungement is restorative justice. An investment in substance abuse prevention is restorative justice. Substance abuse prevention is the alternative to mass incarceration. During the period of mass incarceration of youth and young adults for drug related offences, the investment in substance abuse prevention was marginalized and substance abuse treatment valued. A direct reciprocal correlation exists between mass incarceration for drug offense and substance abuse prevention: increase in mass incarceration decrease in prevention investment, decrease in mass incarceration, increase in prevention investment. The strategy was lock them up and treat them which was an economic strategy not a public health strategy. An investment in prevention is the great state of Maryland's our opportunity for restorative justice. **Restore the investment in prevention.**

The Maryland Prevention Works Coalition (MD-PWC) is an advocacy and education coalition of coalitions, a statewide collaborative. The Coalition's mission is:

- (1) to influence policies, practices, and programs in the State of Maryland to reduce youth substance use and other youth problem behaviors such as youth mental challenges, youth violence, low academic achievement, sexual risk avoidance education, low neighborhood attachment, youth engaged with the juvenile justice system, and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and
- (2) increase collaborative efforts among and within untapped prevention efforts locally, statewide, and nationally.

The MD-PWC seeks to connect community coalitions for collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries to increase the power of population-level change at the state-level. MD-PWC is a statewide prevention movement for positive youth development, youth engagement, and adolescent healthy development, including social-emotional learning. We represent 13 Maryland drug-free coalitions in 7 counties and Baltimore City.

We strongly support with amendments HB 837 – Cannabis Reform. The bill addresses many of the necessary strategies to restore justice to lives lost because of the systematic and structural prejudices from the past criminalization of people's behaviors resulting from lack of adequate investment in underserved

populations and environmental strategies to address poverty experiences, employment preparedness, affordable housing, and educational opportunities. Substance use prevention was casualty of the mass incarceration movement. As such, substance abuse prevention should be a significant investment in the restoration of the harm caused by mass incarceration and an unbalanced approach to substance abuse treatment. Substance abuse treatment is a fruit from the of poisonous mass incarceration.

As such we recommend the following amendments:

On page 26, line 3, delete “at least 5 years of”

On page 26, line 6 delete “and” and insert “one substance abuse prevention practitioner with expertise in youth substance use prevention; one individual with expertise in drug-free community coalitions; and”

On page 29, delete lines 6-7, and insert “supporting environmental strategies for substance abuse prevention, including supporting multisector drug-free community coalitions”

Currently, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides the state of Maryland with approximately \$34 million annual for substance use disorders counseling and treatment from the Substance Abuse Block Grant. The investment from the federal government and the state of Maryland in prevention is dismal. The proposed fund is an opportunity for a balance approach to mass incarceration restorative justice.

MD-PWC defines prevention as an active, assertive *movement* of creating community conditions and environments that promotes the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. A coalition is a partnership of various sectors in society that collaborate to address universal problems and create a pathway for solutions. Some of the sectors of society include youth-serving organizations, schools, businesses, healthcare professionals, civic/volunteer groups, law enforcement, youth, parents, institutions of higher education, elected officials, local government, religious/fraternal organizations, and the like.

The MD-PWC uses evidenced-based prevention tools develop by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America (CADCA). SAMHSA’s Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) is the operational model. The SPF is a 5-step approach to community-level change: Assessment, Planning, Capacity Building, Implementation, and Evaluation. CADCA’s 7 Strategies for Community-Level Change are employed to guide the implementation of programs, activities, and services. The seven strategies are: providing information, building skills, providing support as well as environmental change strategies (enhancing access/reducing barriers, changing consequences, physical design, and modifying/changing policy).

The MD-PWC approach to primary prevention is the public health model advocating for a comprehensive strategy of individual and environmental strategies implemented by multiple organizations in the community. A coalition identifies and coordinates the implementation of the comprehensive strategies. Individual-focused strategies target youth protective and risky behaviors by providing information, building skills, and providing support to make healthy decisions, i.e., direct prevention services to individuals. Environmental-focused strategies focus on the availability of the substance, community norms, and promote regulations to impact community-wide behaviors in the entire community environment.

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