



**BUILDING
MOSAIC
SOLUTIONS,
INC.**

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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 is our opportunity for restorative justice. **Restore the investment in prevention.**

Building Mosaic Solutions Inc (BMS) is an [501c (3)] nonprofit ascribing wholeheartedly to Aristotle’s statement, “the unfortunate need people who will be kind to them; the prosperous need people to be kind to.” As such we work to expand the world of possibilities for marginalized communities through advocacy, education, social action, and collaboration serving the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. We leverage our resources in partnership with key community stakeholders to effect community-level change that positively impacts underprivileged and underserved communities. The services we provide support initiatives to address social determinants of health while reducing health disparities through one of three pillars: *Berlin Prevention Works Coalition for Alcohol & Drug-Free Communities (BPW)*, *Focusing Attitudes & Intentions Through Health Partnerships (FAITH)*, and *Breast Cancer Awareness & Navigation (BCAN)*.

- I. Berlin Prevention Works Coalition for Alcohol & Drug-Free Communities**
Through extensive collaborations, implementation of environmental strategies, and development of award-winning, youth empowerment programming, our BPW program focuses on comprehensive, outcome-based substance misuse and overdose prevention.
- II. Focusing Attitudes & Intentions Through Health Partnerships**
Mosaic built a network of trusted laity in our communities to bridge gaps by promoting equity and education for black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC). We improved outcomes for our community population by extending and expanding access to the COVID-19 vaccine, providing education, and addressing vaccine hesitancy, preventing spread of the virus, reducing serious illness and hospitalizations, and boosting community immunity.
- III. Breast Cancer Awareness & Navigation (BCAN)**
Through online educational programming, public speaking, and peer-to-peer consult, we help patients overcome the barriers of fear, and misinformation about the breast cancer disease and



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its prevention. Our initiatives aim to help underserved, newly diagnosed women to navigate the healthcare system and provide hope to fight.

BMS seeks to connect community stakeholders for collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries to increase the power of population-level change at the county and state-level. BMS is a prevention movement for positive youth development, youth engagement, and adolescent healthy development, including social-emotional learning.

(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.

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.



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BMS 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.

BMS uses evidenced-based prevention tools developed 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).

BMS 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.

If more information is needed, please let us know. We can be reached at (443)-614-1554.

Sincerely,

Darlene Jackson-Bowen, Ph.D., PA
President and CEO, Building Mosaic Solutions, Inc.
Project Director, Berlin Prevention Works Coalition
for Alcohol and Drug Free Communities