

TO: The Honorable Melony Griffith, Chair
Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Annie Coble
Assistant Director, State Affairs

DATE: March 14, 2023

RE: SB618: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Johns Hopkins supports **SB618 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program**. This bill authorizes a community-based organization to establish an Overdose Prevention Site (OPS) under the oversight of the Maryland Department of Health. Under SB618, up to six sites may be established to provide essential harm reduction services to Marylanders, including but not limited to:

- A location supervised by health care professionals for the consumption of pre-obtained drugs;
- Sterile injection supplies and a mechanism for the collection of used hypodermic needles and syringes;
- Education regarding the risks of contracting HIV and viral hepatitis;
- Testing for HIV, viral hepatitis, and sexually transmitted diseases; and
- Direct access or referrals to substance use disorder counseling or treatment.

OPS have been employed globally to reduce the burden of morbidities such as infectious diseases and overdoses. These are predominantly fixed sites where people use pre-obtained drugs in a facility under the supervision of medical professionals in a safe space and also have access to sterile drug paraphernalia (e.g., syringes, cookers, and straws), overdose prevention tools (e.g., naloxone, and drug test strips), and other harm reduction tools. Generally, OPS are safe, provide a mechanism for drug use to be moved out of the street-level community, and have services available to revive the person if there is an overdose. Integrated OPS provide social and primary care services, as well as linkages to substance abuse treatment. There have been numerous sites established throughout the world including throughout Canada and two, recently, in New York City.

Research has documented the association between OPS and reduced risk of HIV, HCV, and overdose among people who utilize such facilities¹. They have also been associated with decreases in fatal overdose deaths, nuisance crimes, and public drug use in the areas surrounding the facilities. Further, OPS provide a touchpoint to engagement and referrals to substance abuse treatment.

¹ <https://jhu.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/acceptability-of-overdose-prevention-sites-in-the-business-commun>

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While not many OPS have been established in the United States at this time, public health researchers have reported on projections for potential utilization and support of an OPS in Baltimore City. A study led by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health published in June 2022 in the *Journal of Urban Health* found that some 77% of 326 people, surveyed in three East Coast cities, who use drugs expressed willingness to use OPS.² Additionally, a 2022 Bloomberg School of Public Health survey reported that upwards of 65% of businesses in Baltimore City would support the establishment of an OPS in their respective neighborhoods.³

With **SB618**, Maryland is positioned to lead the nation in pioneering harm reduction efforts. Accordingly, Johns Hopkins respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on **SB618**.

² <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/02/12/overdose-prevention-sites-facts-649-em1-art0-rea-health/>

³ <https://jhu.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/acceptability-of-overdose-prevention-sites-in-the-business-commun>