

**Senate Bill 618 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease
Prevention Services Program
Finance Committee
March 14, 2023
Position: SUPPORT**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present this testimony in support of Senate Bill 618.

SB 618 will allow community-based organizations in Maryland to establish overdose and infectious disease prevention programs. Overdose prevention sites are facilities where people can use previously purchased drugs under trained supervision. Providing sterile needles, health care services, and referrals to drug treatment, these sites aim to reduce the harms associated with drug use. The bill limits the number of programs to six across the state.

The public health and safety threat from drug and alcohol related intoxication continues to grow. Americans are now more likely to die from opioid overdoses than car crashes¹. Maryland has made progress in recent years to address this epidemic, but we are still in the midst of a crisis that is devastating families across the state. There were over 2,800 overdose deaths in 2021, and though preliminary data from 2022 shows a slight decrease in these fatalities, they are still higher than pre-pandemic levels.

This is a public health crisis that cries out for new solutions. The program proposed in HB 953 is modeled after programs already operating in more than 60 cities in 12 countries around the world. Numerous studies show the positive impact of this particular intervention, with evidence showing that overdose prevention facilities reduce opioid- and overdose-related deaths, reduce public drug use, serve as an access point to behavioral health care and other social services, and reduce hospital admissions and associated costs.

Overdose prevention sites are critical components in the battle to reduce overdose deaths in our state. For this reason, MHAMD strongly supports SB 618 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://www.nsc.org/in-the-newsroom/for-the-first-time-were-more-likely-to-die-from-accidental-opioid-overdose-than-motor-vehicle-crash>