

SB0618

Isabel Klompus

2501 East Fairmount Ave. Baltimore, MD 21224

FAV

My name is Isabel Klompus and I am a licensed social worker in Baltimore City. I support (FAV) SB0618 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program because it is imperative that these services be available to the people of Maryland. Overdose deaths have only surged in the past few years, and our people continue to die. The rise of fentanyl has only exacerbated this issue. Overdose prevention sites are places where people who use drugs can use safely, using new and clean supplies, avoiding the risk of infection from sharing tools such as syringes while being monitored by medical professionals who can reverse overdose when it occurs.

There are many overdose prevention sites functioning all over the world, and saving lives every day. I was able to visit On Point in Harlem, New York City, one of two sites open in the country. I saw first hand how impactful their work has been for their community, and I know that it would be equally impactful in Maryland. As a social worker, I work with many people who use drugs, and I see how much they struggle to find safe spaces where they are respected and taken care of with compassion. Nearly everyone I know in Baltimore knows someone who has died from a fatal overdose. We must take action now, and I know that opening overdose prevention sites in our state is the best way to start.

I learned many things from my visit to New York, but my biggest takeaway was the importance of On Point's relationships with the community. Though their focus is serving their direct participants, they also have a deep relationship with the rest of their community, including other local businesses, schools and the police. By maintaining these relationships, they have become a trusted institution in their neighborhood. They ensure that community members stay safe by providing not only the services at their center, but also by doing extensive outreach, by providing drug testing to ensure a safe supply, by gently and kindly diverting folks from using their drugs near the school among countless other efforts. I know that this is something we can do in Maryland, and something that is needed. This is hard work, but as

harm reduction workers we are asking you to approve this bill because it is work that we are willing and ready to do to save lives.