



ON OUR OWN
OF MARYLAND

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 427: Criminal Procedure-Medical Emergency-Immunity

Thank you Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and committee members for improving the quality and accessibility of healthcare services for Marylanders. On Our Own of Maryland (OOOMD) is a statewide behavioral health (BH) education and advocacy organization, operating for 30 years by and for people with lived experience of mental health and substance use challenges. Our network of 20+ affiliated peer-operated Wellness & Recovery Centers throughout the state offer free, voluntary recovery support services to nearly 6,500 community members.

Maryland's current "Good Samaritan" law is a life-saving measure that provides individuals and bystanders with protection from threat of arrest or incarceration when seeking medical emergency services for an overdose crisis. This law can and does prevent needless deaths from overdose, but it must be enhanced to be fully effective. **OOOMD is in strong support of HB 427, which would enhance and expand immunity to prevent more overdose deaths and ensure all Marylanders are able to receive the life-saving care they need.**

The state's current law provides immunity to any individual who seeks or assists another with receiving emergency medical care related to drug or alcohol use. However, the threat of arrest and incarceration remains a substantial deterrent from members of the public calling for help, because police and prosecutors continue to pursue charges for minor offenses not covered under the current law. HB 427 would clarify that both the victim(s) and person(s) calling for assistance with a substance-related medical emergency are both provided the same immunity from arrest, charge, prosecution, or effect on parole and probation status.

Criminal charges create significant barriers (stigma, time in detention, required court appointments, money for fees, and eligibility roadblocks) that disrupt the time-sensitive and sometimes delicate processes of getting enrolled and maintaining participation in a recovery program. Maryland's behavioral health system has many effective programs and services that help people connect to the services and support they need to heal and improve their lives.

Expansion of the Good Samaritan will save lives, and help more people struggling with substance use to receive medical and behavioral health support, instead of further isolation, stress, and stigma through criminalization. **As an organization, we strongly urge the committee to vote in favor of this important bill.**