



Mission: *To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy*

Vision: *Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities*

HB1121: Public Health – Opioids and Opioid Overdose Reversal Drugs – Information

Hearing Date: 03/01/24

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Position: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of HB 1121. I, Gladys Ndalama, on behalf of the Maryland Public Health Association, wish to voice my unreserved support for HB 1121, a proposed law that seeks to mandate healthcare providers to provide essential information about opioids and opioid overdose reversal drugs when prescribing these powerful medications. The urgency of such regulation is impossible to understate in the face of the relentless opioid crisis that continues to devastate communities across our nation. The National Institute on Drug Abuse presents a sobering reality, revealing that more than 106,000 drug overdose deaths were reported in 2021. Deaths involving synthetic opioids other than methadone (primarily fentanyl) continued to rise with 70,601 overdose deaths¹. This distressing figure underscores the critical need for legislative intervention to help stem this public health crisis. Thus proof that the opioid crisis also imposes a staggering economic burden.

This HB1121 proposes a significant step towards addressing this crisis. The legislation seeks to mandate the education of individuals prescribed opioids about the potential dangers of these drugs and the availability of life-saving opioid overdose reversal drugs. This measure is critically important. Academic research further underscores the importance of education and awareness in combating the opioid crisis. A study published in the National library of Medicine 2023 found a significant relationship between patient education and the likelihood of experiencing an overdose. Patients who received education about naloxone, a drug used to reverse opioid overdoses, were significantly less likely to experience an overdose than those who did not receive such education². This finding powerfully illustrates the vital role of information and awareness in the fight against opioid misuse.

With the introduction of this bill, healthcare providers would have a legal obligation to provide this crucial information. This would equip patients and their families with the knowledge they need to prevent overdoses and potentially save lives. Beyond the immediate impact on patients and their families, this legislation could also serve as a pivotal step in promoting a wider societal understanding of the dangers of opioids and the potential of overdose reversal drugs. By ensuring this information is disseminated at the point of prescription, we are creating a ripple effect of awareness that could extend into communities and beyond. Additionally, this bill could also stimulate more open dialogue between patients and healthcare providers about the risks and benefits of opioid use. This could lead to more informed decision-making, potentially reducing the risk of misuse and addiction.

References:

¹National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA]. (2023, September 25). Drug overdose death rates | National Institute on Drug Abuse. National Institute on Drug Abuse. <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>

²Razaghizad, A. et al. (2021) The effect of overdose education and Naloxone Distribution: An umbrella review of systematic reviews, American journal of public health. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8489614/>

In conclusion, I strongly implore the Maryland General Assembly to pass this bill. This crucial piece of legislation represents a significant step forward in our collective effort to tackle the opioid crisis and mitigate its devastating impact on our communities.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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