

February 14, 2024
The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB497/HB0736 - Health Insurance and Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Coverage - Opioid Reversal Drugs and Products

I write in support of SB497/HB0736, requiring the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and certain insurers, nonprofit health service plans, and health maintenance organizations to cover nonprescription naloxone hydrochloride and any other drug or product that is approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration for the complete or partial reversal of an opioid overdose without imposing a copayment or coinsurance requirement that exceeds \$10 per package.

As a Registered Nurse, resident of Carroll County, parent, and patient who has been prescribed opioids following surgery, I understand the importance of expanding access to naloxone and other opioid overdose reversal agents. I can attest to the vast differences in opioid-related patient care and treatment statewide, as well as general access to life saving measures and services. Statewide improvements must be made.

My daughter was a high school student in the early 2000's when the opioid epidemic hit. Carroll County had one of the highest death rates in the nation. Her car sported a "Heroin Kills" bumper sticker, and education on the dangers of the drug increased significantly. Throughout the years, I watched as she suffered through viewing after viewing, including one for a friend who was found by his parents on Christmas Eve, just a couple of weeks after celebrating his birthday. I knew how helpless she felt, and I couldn't take that away.

As naloxone became more "mainstream", it seemed to empower those who have been in situations like hers. Millennials, and those who have followed, grew up too fast due to an epidemic that did not discriminate. These generations are now prepared to act in the event of an overdose incident and save a life. We should make it as easy as possible for them to do so.

My passion for expanded access to naloxone has not only been informed by my experience as a parent, but also as a medical professional, I know the statistics. Carroll County Maryland outpaced the nation for years in opioid prescriptions.¹ Further, nationwide, we are not seeing the decline in deaths we saw pre-2020. ~110,000 Americans died nationwide in 2022 from an opioid overdose, roughly the population of Columbia, Maryland. Most of these overdose incidents occur outside of medical settings, and the majority occur in homes. We can do better.

¹ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2019/10/14/behind-carroll-countys-opioid-lawsuit-prescription-rate-exceeded-state-even-nation-at-times/>

Loss of life due to an overdose is unnecessary, and in a lot of cases, preventable. The costs to the families, healthcare systems, and society could be significantly limited if Maryland continues to implement legislation to expand access to life saving opioid overdose reversal drugs. By ensuring coverage of this OTC product and capping the cost at an affordable fee for most people, there is significant potential to encourage Marylanders to keep the reversal agent on hand.

Maryland has always been at the forefront of legislation to mitigate the fallout of the opioid epidemic. This situation should be no different. Several states are working to ensure coverage of OTC naloxone, and our state should be doing the same. I would sincerely appreciate the Committee's favorable consideration of SB497/HB0736 so we can stay at the forefront of this ongoing nightmare and encourage Marylanders to save a life if they ever happen to need to.

Sincerely,
Shari Hames
Woodbine, MD