



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1057  
TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE USE AND POSSESSION OF DE MINIMIS QUANTITIES OF  
CONTROLLED DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES

Delegate Sheila Ruth  
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We are all sadly familiar with the devastation that the widespread sale and use of potentially dangerous substances has and continues to cause so many communities not only in Maryland but across the nation. Whether you know a loved one who has struggled with addiction or have witnessed its effects on these communities, you won't likely find anyone entirely insulated from it. Stronger and stronger drugs are becoming more and more available - whether by choice or found laced in ostensibly weaker substances - which is exacerbating this already horrifically common problem. The sudden rash of xylazine-related overdose deaths should be enough of an example, but many more could unfortunately be shared.

However, our society and its laws have long treated drug use as a criminal issue rather than the public health issue that it truly is. People who suffer from substance use disorders (SUDs) are often grouped together with those who traffic in the very substances that harm them, cause addiction and/or physical dependence, can lead to serious and worsening health conditions, and - as we sadly all too often see - death by overdose. This approach punishes victims of these very real mental health disorders - officially recognized as such by the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) published by the American Psychiatric Association - and does nothing to alleviate the problem. A new approach is clearly needed.

In order to help those suffering and mitigate the impact of this crisis, HB1057, which is supported by MedChi and the Maryland-DC Society of Addiction Medicine, will form a task force of experts from a diverse range of backgrounds and sectors including academic research and medicine (including addiction treatment), government and criminal justice, nonprofits and community organizations. This task force will be charged with, among other things:

- studying the relationship between drug use and crime;

- recommending minimal amounts of certain controlled substances that should be eligible for a civil rather than criminal citation for use and/or possession;
- evaluating best practices for State drug courts;
- identifying ways to redirect those found with certain amounts of substances to appropriate non-criminal alternatives like referral to drug education programs or assessments for substance use and/or other mental health disorders, and;
- investigating ways to lower the barriers to treatment modalities; and study harm reduction interventions like better access to appropriate medications, including naloxone (better known as NARCAN).

The purpose of this bill is simply to help those affected by substance use disorders in the best ways we can rather than continue to treat people suffering from mental health disorders like criminals and not the victims of a major public health crisis that they are, as well as their loved ones and communities.

This will require the input of the wide variety of experts this task force will be composed of.

The work this task force produces will be an important start in making sure our communities are safer and healthier. I urge a favorable report on HB1057. Thank you.