



HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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March 13, 2025

Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk, Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT** of House Bill 690: Overdose Awareness Day

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee,

While Howard County saw a 85% percent decrease in nonfatal overdoses from 2018 through 2024, and a 43% decrease in fatal overdose during the same time period, drug overdoses continue to hit our Maryland communities hard. Recent data from Maryland's Overdose Data Dashboard shows that each year, thousands of Marylanders continue to fall victim to overdoses.

House Bill 690 would require the Governor to annually proclaim August 31st as Overdose Awareness Day, part of a global effort to end overdoses. Since I took office in 2019, Howard County opened Howard House, Hilda's Place, and Highland House, which are all treatment houses for men and women recovering from substance misuse disorders. We also opened Sheppard Pratt's new campus in Elkridge, which contains 17 medically managed detox beds for people with co-occurring mental health challenges.

I remain committed to expanding access to life-saving treatment and developing solutions to have a more robust overdose response strategy. We have invested \$1.5 million in residential treatment facilities to create a continuum of care that funds case managers, peer support specialists and a reliable transportation network. In 2023, I created the Opioid Collaborative Community Council to assist in determining how the county should use \$12.3 Million in funds received through a National Settlement Agreement with opioid manufacturers and any future settlements. Howard County also provides nearly \$600,000 annually to support behavioral health navigation. Finally, during the past year, our Health Department has trained nearly 2,000 people in its Overdose Response program, which includes naloxone administration. They also distributed over 2,100 naloxone kits last year alone.

Howard County proudly hosts its own International Overdose Awareness Day event every year, which brings together partners throughout the community to honor the individuals we have lost to overdose. Howard County's event also provides an opportunity for people to receive information on available treatment and recovery resources, naloxone and other harm reduction training, and to meet people in recovery who are residing in Howard County's halfway houses.



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The public acknowledgment of this day of awareness helps to diminish the stigma of those who have lost their lives to substance misuse and the grief of the families and loved ones left behind. The tragic loss of life is preventable with proper access to care, community support and continued investments from public/private partnerships.

Publicly destigmatizing what has long been perceived as criminal behavior, a private family matter or source of shame would be a step in the direction towards healing and recovery. I welcome your partnership on this critical acknowledgement and urge a favorable report on HB 690.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive