



## Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Finance Committee

March 10, 2020

Senate Bill 990: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

### POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION

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Senator Hettleman, Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Finance Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) submits this **LETTER OF INFORMATION** for Senate Bill 990: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.

This legislation would authorize a “community-based organization” (CBO) to establish an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program. A program must, among other requirements, provide a supervised location where drug users can consume pre-obtained drugs, as well as receive other services, education, and referrals. However, a CBO must first receive approval from the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), in consultation with the local health department (LHD). MDH may not approve more than six programs and, to the extent practicable, should distribute programs evenly among urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State with each area receiving no more than two programs. Each program must operate at a single location in an area with a high incidence of drug use.

MRHA’s mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland. Rural Maryland represents almost 80 percent of Maryland’s land area and 25% of its population. Of Maryland’s 24 counties, 18 are considered rural by the state, and with a population of over 1.6 million they differ greatly from the urban areas in the state.

Maryland law states that “many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitations, and economic development infrastructure.” (West’s Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b)

**MRHA believes that access to these services is important to rural Marylanders and urges this committee to give this legislation serious consideration. Safe consumption sites have been shown to significantly decrease overdose deaths within a community. Given higher EMS response times within rural areas, the quick administration of lifesaving measures at an overdose prevention site may be particularly beneficial to rural communities. To ensure the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents, MRHA recommends that careful consideration be given to the need for oversight of Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Programs.**

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