



BALTIMORE CITY

SUBSTANCE ABUSE DIRECTORATE

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House Bill 463/Senate Bill 172 Support

The Baltimore City Substance Abuse Director (BSCAD) is an advocacy and provider organization comprised of 30 Baltimore City substance use disorders treatment providers representing all levels of care from prevention to residential treatment. Our mission is the promotion of high-quality, best-practice and effective substance use disorders treatment for the citizens of Baltimore City. We are also involved in and support legislation that ensures our citizens get the best possible care through active consideration of legislation as it relates to the health and well-being of our consumer population.

As such, BCSAD strongly supports House Bill 463/Senate Bill 172, as it would create Health Equity Resources Communities in Maryland to focus health resources in the neighborhoods where they are needed the most. These resources would be paid for by a one penny on the dollar increase on the alcohol beverage sales tax, imposed first on liquor stores, and two years later on bars and restaurants.

HB 463/SB 172 will address inequities by race, ethnicity, disability, and geography and ensure that every Marylander, regardless of who they are or where they live, has access to the healthcare they deserve.

Baltimore City Substance Use Disorder providers witness first hand the impact of these health care inequities on the persons they serve. The past year's pandemic has highlighted these disparities even further. When consumers do not have easy access to comprehensive health care to manage chronic illnesses, they turn to Emergency Departments for primary care or these conditions spiral out of control until the patient is hospitalized to treat what could have been preventable. The endpoint of this lack of access is a 20-year gap in life expectancy depending on where you live in Maryland.

Maryland raised its alcohol tax in 2011 which led to significant reductions in underage drinking, binge drinking, driving under the influence, and sexually transmitted infections. Maryland has not raised its alcohol beverage sales tax since 2011 and its rate has fallen behind that of Washington, D.C. Raising the state's alcohol beverage sales tax will not only generate necessary funds to improve health equity and boost behavioral health programs, but will also reduce drinking, including by underage Marylanders and heavy drinkers, which in turn will save lives and reduce health care costs.

BCSAD urges a favorable report on House Bill 463/Senate Bill 172 and we look forward to working with legislators and our communities to effectively incorporate this harm reduction strategy into the public behavioral health system.

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