



Baltimore's premiere organizing and advocacy non-profit of low to moderate-income persons most impacted by systems of injustice proudly submits this written testimony of our strong support of SB0279 to authorize overdose prevention sites (OPS) in the State of Maryland.

We were founded in 2010 with the purpose of organizing members in stigmatized communities including neighborhoods of socially ill-repute. This mission led us to hire a spitfire, legendary organizer William Miller, Sr. Mr. Miller Sr. organized and created power among those who with a history or who actively use drugs. He believed that no person in recovery was 'clean' because that implies they were at one point dirty. He believed that with the realization of power, we could organize harm reduction efforts at the grassroots level to improve conditions for all drug users across our State. In October 2020, harm reductionists lost a powerful advocate with the death of William Miller, Sr. to a sudden overdose. Miller's passing sent a sharp jolt through both our organization and the harm reduction community in our city. OPS could have saved his life. They could also save any of the 205 persons who died from overdoses in Baltimore in the first quarter of 2020 or the 427 people who overdosed in the second quarter.

Our organizing in Baltimore's Gilmor homes and McCulloh Homes (Baltimore's 40th Legislative District) provide essential education to drug users and the families and communities that know, love and depend upon them. This education has lead our people to say of OPS, "Yes, In my neighborhood!" They cannot refuse the opportunity to save lives, which far outweighs the stigma that causes people to act or vote counter to harm reduction efforts.

We humbly, yet stridently ask that this committee takes a stand against death. Take a stand against further harm and against unsubstantiated stigma. Take a stand to make Maryland a leader in preventing overdoses. If the number of homicide deaths is a public health crisis - which we argue they are - then surely overdose deaths which are double to triple those deaths should be addressed with the same sense of urgency. We have a solution, and that is OPS.

In the hundreds of safe use sites across the world, there have been no deaths due to overdoses. Overdose prevention sites save lives. As Mr. Will Miller Sr said to you last year: "The question is simple, if you dare to answer it: Do you want to save lives, or don't you?!"

You do. Show it with your support of SB0279.

Thank you.

Communities United