



PROGRESSIVE MARYLAND

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Testimony on Maryland Senate Bill 279 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

TO: Sen. Kelley, Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Katy Edwards, Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Taskforce Leader,
Anne Arundel County (D30)
DATE: January 22, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB279. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

My name is Katy Edwards and I currently work in police diversion here in the city of Annapolis. I have nine years of experience in behavioral health and throughout this time I have seen how the War on Drugs is a direct attack on impoverished communities throughout this country.

Overdose Prevention Sites are currently an essential need throughout the state of Maryland. ["Over 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States in the 12 months ending in May 2020."](#) In light of these absolutely horrifying numbers, it is essential to reflect on the fact that OPS sites have never had one single death occur. This is an evidence-based method which reliably saves people's lives. This fact clearly signals that this bill has not been passed due to remaining stigma placed on drug users throughout our state. If we look to Portugal where overdose prevention sites operate and illicit substance use has been decriminalized, we see extremely large drops in substance use as a whole and consequently a huge drop in overdose deaths.

Currently in America, we place moral judgements on drug user's lives and continue to dangerously displace many Maryland residents who currently exhibit co-occurring symptoms. For so many people the path to recovery is not a linear process. It is a well-known fact in behavioral health that many drug users face mental health barriers and community stigma only escalates those conditions. In the end, if we are aware that creating safe space for stigmatized people saves lives, we should all aim to work towards that goal. I call upon my elected officials to continue to work for all people of Maryland without stigma. We urge a favorable report.



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TO: Sen. Kelley, Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Joseph Dacey, Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Taskforce Leader,
Baltimore (D44A)
DATE: January 22, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB279. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

I am writing in strong support of SB279 to establish supervised consumption and overdose prevention sites (OPSs) across the state of Maryland.

For too long, people who are addicted to drugs have been driven away from help – away from resources that can give them hope and an escape - due to the fear of prosecution and imprisonment. Often a law enforcement officer, a correctional officer, or a probation officer may be the only contact the state has with an addicted person. It is not their job – nor should it be their job - to connect the person to social services that can help them through their addiction. This is where an overdose prevention site can be a critical lifeline to an addicted person.

The staff of the OPS is an off-ramp from addiction that can avoid the use of law enforcement and correctional resources. People who are addicted can be directly linked with services at the OPS at the time when they are needed without the constant threat of arrest or harassment. They will be treated as people in need of help instead of criminals who need to be locked up.

Please stand up against policies which morally condemn our community members who are currently experiencing a public health crisis. You can do this by supporting Senate Bill 279. This policy would be one step closer to helping those that are in need of evidence-based assistance without subjective condemnation. We urge a favorable report.



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TO: Sen. Kelley, Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Wanda Bannerman, Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Taskforce Leader,
Prince George's County (D27A)
DATE: January 22, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB279. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

It is sad to say we humans are so fragile and weak that drug use seems to be the way many people deal with problems. In a perfect world, there would be no need for drug Illicit drug use. We are not living in a perfect world! In our sad difficult life, many people find escape through drugs these drugs sometimes ruin their future and take their lives many times they go to jail and harm their bodies. If we can find a way to at least allow people to live through this tragic experience then perhaps they can get on the road to recovery. Inside of an overdose prevention site, our community members could find a safe environment to use and maybe find a way out, a way back to a safe normal life.

I beg you to agree to try this please for us to work as a community and save people. We should review and understand how these sites have helped other communities. There is no cost-effectiveness for simply locking people up.

Thank you for your time and attention. We urge a favorable report.



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TO: Sen. Kelley, Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Eryck Stamper, Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Taskforce Leader,
Baltimore (D46)
DATE: January 22, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB 279. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

I'm writing to urge you to support SB 279. The creation of an important program like the Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Service Program is important to me and I believe many in my local community and state as a whole will benefit from its offerings and language.

This afternoon I went outside to walk a guest to their vehicle, we had to dodge various needles, plungers and broken drug burned glass in the gutter and area next to their car. A real sad, painful and embarrassing moment as a property owner as I have pride in ownership and care for our community. As a father attempting to raise my daughter in a clean, healthy safe and sound environment, this is not acceptable. She's 12 years old and not even allowed beyond the limited bounds of our small yard and chained fence alone (how did we play at 12?). I can't trust many areas we traverse as we see people literally strung out laying on the street in drug induced states, fighting and screaming over drugs and money. This is traumatic coming from a military Veteran who suffers medical conditions and even more harmful on the forming brain of a young girl. I can't keep my blinders on and ignore it any longer as I travel our great state of Maryland. These are hard realities to face and even harder questions and daily reminders to answer to my daughter in our current state.

We urge a favorable report.



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TO: Sen. Kelley, Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Henry Farkas, Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Taskforce Leader,
Baltimore County (D11)
DATE: January 22, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB 279. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

As an old, retired emergency physician, I've seen and treated many drug overdose patients. The problem with drug overdoses is that they need to be treated within five minutes of cessation of breathing. If treated in time, the patient lives. If not treated in time, the patient dies. It's that simple. That's why having a place to go in order to shoot up drugs of abuse is so important.

But there are more reasons to fund this initiative. Drugs are more dangerous than ever. That's because fentanyl and the various chemical cousins of fentanyl are both extremely potent and less expensive than heroin. Heroin needs to be imported. Fentanyl can be made in a lab in someone's basement or garage. Fentanyl is so potent that the amount needed to kill is less than a hundredth of an ounce, considerably less. And the powder can be absorbed through the skin.

Also, having a place to use these dangerous drugs where there's an available rescuer with Narcan, the rescue drug, means that the drug abusers will come in contact with someone who can refer them for detox and rehab. The abusers will have chances to get plugged in to treatment and recovery.

We urge a favorable report.



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TO: Sen. Kelley, Chair, and members of the Senate Finance Committee
FROM: Alfrieda Hylton, Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Taskforce Leader,
Prince George's County (D24)
DATE: January 22, 2021
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on SB 279. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

I have a granddaughter who's 27 years of age, a heroin addict and I've seen the side effects of the drugs and witness withdrawals, reckless behavior, where she becomes unrecognizable. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the overdose crisis and to share my views on how it's affecting individuals, families, and communities across our nation. I'm devastated by the misused and increasing prescription and illicit opioid abuse, addiction, and overdose, including paraphernalia, heroin, and methadone. The most alarming is the significant and continued increases in overdose deaths. Too many of our citizens are being robbed of their God-given potential in the prime of their life. Healthcare providers prescribed opioids to treat pain in ways that are high risks associated with opioid abuse, addiction, and overdose when prescribed at high doses and longer durations. There is a lack of health system and healthcare provider capacity to identify and engage individuals that provide them with high-quality, evidence-based opioid addiction treatment.


According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in Maryland, nearly 90% of drug overdose deaths involved opioids in 2018; a total of 2,087 deaths (a rate of 33.7) and, in 2018, 67,367 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States. The age-adjusted rate of overdose deaths decreased by 4.6% from 2017 (21.7 per 100,000) to 2018 (20.7 per 100,000). Opioids—mainly synthetic opioids (other than methadone) are currently the main driver of drug overdose deaths. Opioids were involved in 46,802 overdose deaths in 2018 (69.5% of all drug overdose deaths). Two out of three (67.0%) opioid-involved overdose deaths involved synthetic opioids. Thus, treating only the individual with the active disease of addiction is limited in effectiveness.


Do you know that you can help people who are most at risk for opioid use disorder and overdose in the State of Maryland? As well as helping those struggling with opioid, heroin, and methadone use disorder find the right care and treatment. I strongly believe representatives of District 24 are willing to take a



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major step to combat substance misuse and protect the State of Maryland communities from the scourge of opioid, heroin, and methadone addictions by providing support to those individuals fighting addictions and having access to appropriate interventions treatment facilities, as well as expanding government services to individuals battling with drug addiction.

We urge a favorable report.