

January 26, 2020

Chair Delores Kelly  
Finance Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 East  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: SUPPORT of Senate Bill 279  
(Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program) -  
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Kelly and Senate Finance Committee Members,

Repair Now, a nonprofit organization founded in 2017, supports Senate Bill 279 "Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program," which will allow community based organizations such as our organization to establish overdose prevention programs to reduce overdose deaths, which continue to occur at unprecedented levels in Maryland.

Repair Now provides information about the rights of people with criminal records and criminal statuses, is focused on providing information pertaining to expungement, records mitigation, and voting eligibility.

Maryland is in the midst of an epidemic of accidental, fatal opiate & opioid overdoses because we are in the midst of a disaster caused by drug prohibition and the drug war. The leading driver of accidental, fatal overdoses is drug prohibition. When we make public policy decisions which lead consumers of any substance to acquire it in the illicit market, we are guaranteeing specific outcomes which will inevitably lead to accidental, fatal overdoses.

In the illicit market, there are no quality controls. There are no safety inspectors or safety regulations. And, each person in the supply chain between the producer and the consumer has a financial incentive to adulterate the substance in question in order to increase their personal financial gain. Every time a substance user consumes a substance obtained in the illicit marketplace, they're doing so without knowing exactly what they may be ingesting unintentionally.

Prohibition also ensures an unnecessary negative impact in public health outcomes for those who are not using illicit substances. Illicit drug use disproportionately affects those who are homeless or facing housing and employment instability. As a result, many substance users are consuming or ingesting in public spaces, like restrooms or parks. This poses a potential health risk to the public at large and also increases the likelihood of accidental, fatal overdose for substance users who are ingesting in whatever secluded space they can find due to their fear of arrest and stigmatization.

Now, of course I understand that this body does not have the power or purview to end the drug war and drug prohibition on its own. But what it can do, is ensure that overdose prevention sites and decriminalization of simple possession of all drugs are part of any strategy to deal with this issue.

Overdose prevention sites are already operating in other parts of the world, including Europe

and Canada. None of these facilities has ever had a single fatal overdose despite having been in operation for years and, in some cases, decades. These facilities also provide a point of service between public health professionals & social workers with those who are experiencing a substance use disorder.

With respect to decriminalization, we know that the criminal justice system is not the best way to connect those with substance use disorders with treatment services. So, why can't we skip the part where we arrest them and go straight to the treatment? If we did that, we should expect that those with substance use disorders to be more likely to come forward and ask for help since they would no longer fear criminal penalties with respect to their personal substance use patterns.

In short, I implore you to vote yes on SB279 and explore drug decriminalization as a strategy to address this very serious issue.

Respectfully,  
Scott B. Cecil  
Advocacy Director of Repair Now  
Councilmember, City of Mount Rainier, MD