



SB 279 – Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Senate Finance Committee

Date: January 26, 2021

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for someone with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide one-to-one support to parents and caregivers of young people with mental health issues and to any loved one who cares for someone with a substance use or gambling issue.

SB 279 would allow the establishment of up to six programs that provide a place for individuals to consume pre-obtained drugs. Programs would provide sterile needles, administer first aid as needed, and connect individuals to services. MCF supports this bill.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has severely negatively impacted Maryland's opioid crisis. Data shows that fatal overdoses by opioids increased during the second and third quarters of 2020 by 21% over the same period in 2019. People who have a substance use disorder have been especially hard hit by the pandemic – isolation, the disruption of support systems, and the restrictions in access to treatment have all contributed to increases in substance use and relapse.

MCF has twelve family peer support staff who provide peer support and navigation services to families who have a child or other loved one with a substance use disorder. All of these staff have lived experience caring for someone with a substance use disorder. Some staff members have lost a child to an opioid overdose, others have a child in recovery from opioid use disorder, and others have a child who is still out there using opioids. While our staff provide support to families of any loved one suffering from any substance use disorder, about one-half of the families that we work with have a child addicted to opioids.

MCF is in favor SB 279. We know the desperation of parents and caregivers who have a child actively using opioids. The fear of getting a call that their child has overdosed is ever present among these families.

Supervised Consumption Facilities exist across the world and have for decades. They have been the subject of many rigorous studies, which have shown that there is very little downside to such programs – on the contrary, there is great benefit, including:

- a reduction in blood-borne diseases
- a reduction in bacterial infections
- a reduction in fatalities owing to an overdose
- an increase in treatment engagement

In addition, Supervised Consumption Facilities produce significant cost savings – a 2017 study estimated that there would be \$4.35 saved for every dollar spent.

We are aware that there are logistical barriers to implementing such a program. They must be overcome in order to save lives.

We urge a favorable report on SB 279.

Contact: Ann Geddes
Director of Public Policy
The Maryland Coalition of Families
10632 Little Patuxent Parkway, Suite 234
Columbia, Maryland 21044
Phone: 443-741-8668
ageddes@mdcoalition.org