



January 26, 2021

**Senate Finance Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

SB 279- Public Health-Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Site Program

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. **Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 77,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.**

Behavioral Health System Baltimore is in support of SB 279- Public Health-Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Site Program. This bill authorizes a community-based organization to establish an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Site Program in no more than six locations throughout the state.

COVID-19 has increased the need for mental health and substance use disorder services in Maryland. According to data released by the Maryland Department of Health, the number of overdose deaths from drugs and alcohol in Maryland increased 12% in the first three quarters of 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019.

BHSB supports SB 279 as we recognize the need for innovative public health interventions to address the opioid crisis in Baltimore City and our state. While the General Assembly has taken laudable steps to address the opioid crisis through measures such, as increasing access to the lifesaving drug naloxone and authorizing syringe services programs more interventions are needed.

The Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Program proposed in this legislation mirrors the programs established across the world. Evidence from these sites show that facilities that allow safer drug use reduce overdose deaths and provide an entry into treatment. They target high-risk drug-users who would otherwise inject in unsafe places. This population is at significant risk of death from overdose, which medical supervision can effectively eliminate. There has not been a single overdose fatality at any safer drug use facility. A study of a Canadian facility found that overdose mortality dropped 35% in the area surrounding the facility after it opened.¹ The facilities proposed in this bill can serve as an access point to substance use disorder treatment and other social services. One study of a Canadian facility found that participants increased detoxification services by more than 30 percent.²

¹ Brandon DL Marshall et al., "Reduction in overdose mortality after the opening of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility: a retrospective population-based study," *The Lancet* 377, no. 9775 (2011): 1429-37.

² E Wood et al., "Rate of detoxification service use and its impact among a cohort of supervised injection facility users," *Addiction* 102(2007): 918.

We must continue to look for innovative ways to engage people who use drugs around safer drug use and connections to treatment. The Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Site Programs could advance this goal. As such, **BHSB urges the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 279.**
