



February 22, 2022

House Appropriations Committee
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT
HB 794 Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is 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 supports HB 794 Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council- This bill establishes an Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council that would provide recommendations regarding the allocation of money from the Opioid Restitution Fund (ORF). The Governor must consult at least twice annually with the advisory council to identify recommended appropriations from the ORF.

The Opioid Restitution Fund was established in 2019 to help guide the allocation of funds that Maryland receives through legal action against opioid manufacturers and distributors. As part of that legislation, it required that the Administration consult annually with substance use treatment and prevention providers, consumers, families, and advocates to identify recommended appropriations from the fund. BHSB supports HB 794 because it will establish a more formal process to engage stakeholders in decisions around the appropriations of the ORF.

Fatal overdoses in Maryland unfortunately continue to rise. The number of overdose deaths in Maryland in 2020 were 2,773. This represents a 16.6 percent increase from 2019. During the same period Baltimore City reported 954 fatal overdose deaths.¹ The increase in overdose deaths highlight how important to invest in and expand access to robust substance use disorder treatment and supportive services.

Stakeholders provide valuable expertise in what services are needed in their communities and should be engaged in any process that determines how funding is distributed and invested. Maryland must join other states such as Massachusetts in establishing an Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council to ensure families, consumers, and communities that have been severely impacted by the opioid epidemic have a voice in the way that the ORF is allocated to ensure that the services best serve the community. **As such, BHSB urges the House Appropriations Committee to support HB 794.**

¹ Maryland Opioid Operational Command Center 2020 Annual Report
<https://beforeitstoolate.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2021/04/2020-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>