



HB 794 – Public Health – Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council

Committee: Appropriations

Date: March 1, 2022

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for a loved one with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to family members with a child, youth or adult with a mental health, substance use or gambling issue.

MCF strongly supports HB 794.

HB 794 would ensure both stakeholder input and transparency in the spending of the Opioid Restitution Fund dollars. Unfortunately, nearly 3,000 Marylanders lost a child or other loved one to an opioid overdose in the last year alone. Families, along with those who tragically lost their lives, have been most greatly impacted by the opioid overdose epidemic. The voices of these family members must inform all conversations about how the dollars should be spent. We appreciate that the bill designates that at least one member of the Council be a family member – more would be better.

Black Marylanders have been disproportionately affected by the opioid crisis. Between 2017-2019, overdose deaths decreased by 11% for white Marylanders, but increased by almost 40% for Black Marylanders. The bill addresses this disproportionality by rightly requiring representation from communities that have been most greatly impacted by the opioid crisis. The state's overdose prevention and intervention strategies clearly have not been successful in communities of color. The voice of these communities must be at the table.

An additional reason for the bill is that the Department hasn't always been sufficiently transparent about where federal dollars have gone. HB 794 would ensure transparency and accountability in the spending of the opioid restitution funds.

Therefore we urge a favorable report on HB 794.

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