

HB 699
Letter of Information

TO: The Honorable Shane Pendergrass, Chair
House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Annie Coble
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DATE: February 16, 2022

Johns Hopkins would like to provide information relating to HB699 Office of the Chief Medical Examiner - Grief Counseling Services. This bill would require the Chief Medical Examiner, in coordination with BHA, to establish a grief counseling services program. Also, the bill allows the program to be funded through the Opioid Restitution Fund. Providing grief counseling services to those impacted by the loss of a loved one is tremendously important work and we appreciate the State prioritizing the mental and emotional health of its citizens. However, we have concerns about using the Opioid Restitution Fund to cover the costs of this program.

The Opioid Restitution Fund was created in 2019 to retain any revenues received by the State relating to specific opioid judgments or settlements. This Fund is a vital resource to support the fight against the Opioid Epidemic and should be used strategically. Johns Hopkins would urge the State to take a deliberate approach at using the Fund.

There is a precedent for using settlement funds strategically and carefully in the Cigarette Restitution Fund (CRF). The CRF was created in 2000 with the goal to implement strategies to reduce the burden of tobacco related disease in Maryland. CRF has been preserved and utilized over the years to fund local public health programs, surveillance and evaluation initiatives and innovative research. Johns Hopkins would urge the general assembly to be as thoughtful with the Opioid Restitution Fund as they have been with the CRF.