



PROGRESSIVE MARYLAND

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Testimony on Maryland House Bill 953 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

TO: Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the Health & Government Operations Committee

FROM: Joseph Dacey, Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Taskforce Leader, Baltimore (D44A)

DATE: February 28, 2023

POSITION: Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on HB953. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

I am writing in strong support of HB953 to establish supervised consumption and overdose prevention sites (OPSs) across the state of Maryland.

For too long, people who are addicted to drugs have been driven away from help – away from resources that can give them hope and an escape - due to the fear of prosecution and imprisonment. Often a law enforcement officer, a correctional officer, or a probation officer may be the only contact the state has with an addicted person. It is not their job – nor should it be their job - to connect the person to social services that can help them through their addiction. This is where an overdose prevention site can be a critical lifeline to an addicted person.

The staff of the OPS is an off-ramp from addiction that can avoid the use of law enforcement and correctional resources. People who are addicted can be directly linked with services at the OPS at the time when they are needed without the constant threat of arrest or harassment. They will be treated as people in need of help instead of criminals who need to be locked up.

Please stand up against policies which morally condemn our community members who are currently experiencing a public health crisis. You can do this by supporting House Bill 953. This policy would be one step closer to helping those that are in need of evidence-based assistance without subjective condemnation. We urge a favorable report.