



MARYLAND LEGISLATIVE LATINO CAUCUS

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TO: Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk, Chair
Delegate Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair
Health and Government Operations Committee Members
FROM: Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus
DATE: March 3rd, 2023
RE: HB0953 Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

The MLLC supports HB0953 Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

The MLLC is a bipartisan group of Senators and Delegates committed to supporting legislation that improves the lives of Latinos throughout our state. The MLLC is a crucial voice in the development of public policy that uplifts the Latino community and benefits the state of Maryland. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to express our support of HB0953.

The overdose crisis affects all Marylanders, including the Latino community. Maryland has one of the highest rates of any state for opioid overdose related deaths.¹ People with substance addictions are largely criminalized rather than offered support. The research shows that providing a safe space for people who use drugs - which are increasingly contaminated by fentanyl - to consume alongside trained staff saves lives.² There has never been a documented fatal overdose at a supervised OPS. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) estimates that 1.1 million Hispanic/Latino youth used illicit drugs in the past year, including 208,000 who misused opioids in the past year.³ Occupational exposures have been associated with the use of opioid pain medications in the Hispanic/Latino population, often leading to substance use disorder.⁴ Moreover, many documented and undocumented Hispanic/Latinos will not seek treatment for themselves, family members or friends for fear of deportation.⁵

This bill would enable community-based organizations to open pilot overdose prevention sites (OPS) that allow people who use drugs a safe place to consume pre-obtained drugs. Community based organizations have pre-established relationships with marginalized communities which is essential to ensure those who need it the most reach out when they need it. This initiative will allow Maryland to curb the number of overdose deaths in our state and treat addiction as a public health crisis. The Latino Caucus should support this bill to allow for communities to offer an additional evidence-based tool to prevent overdose deaths and save the lives of Latino Marylanders.

For these reasons, the Maryland Legislative Latino Caucus respectfully requests a favorable report on HB0953.

¹ [The Opioid Crisis and the Hispanic/Latino Population: An Urgent Issue. \(2020\). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\).](#)

² [Overdose Prevention Centers. \(n.d.\). Drug Policy Alliance.](#)

³ [Opioid and Illicit Drug Use Among the Hispanic/Latino Populations. \(n.d.\).](#)

⁴ [The Opioid Crisis and the Hispanic/Latino Population: An Urgent Issue. \(2020\). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\).](#)

⁵ *ibid.*