



**Committee: Health and Government Operations**

**Testimony on: HB0953/SB0618 – Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program**

**Position: Favorable**

**Hearing Date: March 7, 2023**

*Submitted on behalf of the student chapter of Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility (CPSR). CPSR is a statewide evidence-based organization of over 940 physicians and other health professionals and supporters that addresses existential public health threats: nuclear weapons, the climate crisis, and the issues of pollution and toxic effects on health, as seen through the intersectional lens of environmental, social, and racial justice.*

**I strongly support HB0953/SB0618**, which will allow for the creation of overdose prevention centers in Maryland. This bill will allow users a safe place to consume illicit substances under the supervision of staff members to prevent overdoses and deaths while connecting users with resources and treatment options.

As a medical student, I have been taught numerous times about the destructive effects the opioid crisis has on individuals, families, and communities. I have seen patients overdose countless times in the hospital, but I have also seen my own family members overdose more times that I can remember. My parents abused opioid medications, and often I was the one who found them when they overdosed. This was devastating to witness as a child, and I was never sure if my parents would live or die. This cycle repeated every time they were released from the hospital because they did not have a safe place to consume their substances and did not have connections to treatment options. The emotional burden of repeatedly seeing my parents nearly die greatly affected my childhood and was a driving factor for me to attend medical school; I sought to help those that I felt the medical system failed. However, after entering medical school, I realized that this issue extends far beyond the medical system. Drug abuse is a medical condition, but its stigmatization and criminalization prevent individuals from receiving the care that they need. Addicts are often dehumanized because of their substance use, but in reality, they are one of the most vulnerable populations that needs compassion and care.

Providing supervised drug use facilities would be life-changing to thousands of people who desperately need help. These facilities provide a safe place to use substances and prevent accidental deaths from overdose. Similar facilities that have opened in New York have saved hundreds of lives, prevented the transmission of blood-borne diseases, such as hepatitis B and HIV, and have helped connect users to substance use treatment (1). The number of accidental overdoses is rising, both nationally and in Maryland, and changes need to be made in order to

help these individuals. In the 12 months ending in September 2022, Maryland saw 2,487 fatal overdoses, largely from fentanyl (2). These overdose deaths are preventable, and the current operating overdose prevention centers have been shown to prevent and reverse nearly all of these deaths (3).

As public workers, I believe we have the responsibility to help those who need it the most. I joined the medical field to provide compassionate care to all of my patients, regardless of their background, social status, or whether they use recreational substances. There is only so much that I can do inside the medical system to make sure these patients are receiving the care that they need; the creation of these facilities would help prevent these individuals from needing to enter the medical system for their overdose when it is often already too late.

I strongly support and urge favorable action on HB0953/SB0618 which aims to create no more than 6 overdose prevention centers in the state of Maryland, all subject to state and local regulation. Passage of this bill will protect the health of all Maryland residents by preventing fatal overdose deaths and help connect vulnerable populations to treatment resources.

Respectfully submitted,

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## References

1. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2794323>
2. <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/799cc6c21cf94e89a174fa06532febd9>
3. <https://nida.nih.gov/sites/default/files/NIH-RTC-Overdose-Prevention-Centers.pdf>