



HB 953 – Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Date: March 7, 2023

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 challenge.

MCF is pleased to submit this testimony in support of HB 953. HB 953 would allow the establishment of up to six programs that provide a place for individuals to consume pre-obtained drugs. Programs would provide sterile needles, administer first aid as needed, and connect individuals to services.

The COVID-19 Pandemic severely negatively impacted Maryland's opioid crisis. Data on fatal overdoses shows:

- 2019: 2,090 deaths
- 2020: 2,399 deaths
- 2021: 2,824 deaths
- 2022: 2,454 deaths

While 2022 saw a welcome decline in overdose deaths over the preceding year, deaths are still higher than pre-COVID levels. People with substance use disorders were especially hard hit by the pandemic – isolation, the disruption of support systems, and the restrictions in access to treatment all contributed to increases in substance use and relapse. In addition, the increasing use of fentanyl has had a devastating impact.

MCF has 15 family peer support staff who provide peer support and navigation services to families who have a child or other loved one with a substance use disorder. All of these staff have lived experience caring for someone with a substance use disorder. Some staff members have lost a child to an opioid overdose, others have a child in recovery from opioid use disorder, and others have a child who is still out there using opioids. While our staff provide support to families of any loved one suffering from any substance use disorder, about one-half of the families that we work with have a child addicted to opioids.

At MCF, we know the desperation of parents and caregivers who have a child actively using opioids. The fear of getting a call that their child has overdosed is ever present among these families. Safe consumption sites are one answer to address the problem.

Supervised Consumption Facilities exist across the world and have for decades. They have been the subject of many rigorous studies, which have shown that there is very little downside to such programs – on the contrary, there is great benefit, including:

- a reduction in blood-borne diseases
- a reduction in bacterial infections
- a reduction in fatalities owing to an overdose
- an increase in treatment engagement

In addition, Supervised Consumption Facilities produce significant cost savings – a 2017 study estimated that there would be \$4.35 saved for every dollar spent.

We are aware that there are logistical barriers to implementing such a program. They must be overcome in order to save lives.

We urge a favorable report on HB 953.

Ann Geddes
Director of Public Policy
The Maryland Coalition of Families
8950 State Route 108, Suite 223
Columbia, Maryland 21045
Phone: 443-926-3396
ageddes@mdcoalition.org