



Maryland Addiction Directors Council

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

House Health & Government Operations Committee

March 7, 2023

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

Maryland Addiction Directors Council (MADC) represents Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and Dual Recovery outpatient and residential providers in Maryland. MADC members provide over 1,200 residential beds across the State and advocate for quality SUD and Dual Recovery outpatient and residential treatment.

MADC supports House Bill 953 and the efforts of leaders in the legislature to allow for the creation of Overdose Prevention Sites. This will help keep people with SUDs alive and reduce their chances of contracting long-term and life-threatening diseases. The magnitude of the addiction epidemic demands a comprehensive approach to treatment, including harm reduction strategies, medication-assisted treatment and other evidence-based practices to meet clients at a place they will reduce harm to themselves and/or access treatment.

Contrary to what critics say, safe injection practices do not promote drug use. Rather, they are an attempt to meet users where they are at that moment, whether interested in seeking treatment or not, but more importantly keeping them alive and reducing the chance they will contract any number of life-threatening diseases. Our job is not to judge but to provide all of the means possible to treat substance use disorder and end dependence on opioids, while preventing further harm.

Evidence-based harm reduction, as a concept and a practice, needs to be a greater focus of policymakers. Harm reduction may take the form of educating someone not to share needles and to use a new needle each time they do use. It may be reviewing injection practices and recommending they not use well water or adding a filter to reduce particulate matter. Harm reduction may be implementing a buddy system and not using alone and making sure naloxone is immediately available in case.

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Harm reduction is imperative for us to incorporate as we all collaborate and work to end the opioid epidemic that has taken the lives of our family, friends, colleagues and neighbors. According to the CDC, users of harm reduction services are five times more likely to enter drug treatment programs and three times more likely to stop using drugs than people who don't use the programs.

Finally, the recent experience in New York City which has had two overdose prevention sites in operation for well over a year, shows that these programs are effective and save people's lives. It's time for Maryland to take this step to allow communities who choose to, to open these programs.

Maryland Addiction Directors Council urges this committee to pass House Bill 953.