



March 7, 2023

**RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 953  
(Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program) -  
FAVORABLE**

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk  
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee  
Room 241, House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and House Health and Government Operations Committee Members,

BRIDGES Coalition for Overdose Prevention Sites supports *HB953 - Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program*. This bill will allow community-based organizations, such as our trained membership of over 30 organizations and dozens of harm reduction workers, to establish overdose prevention programs to reduce overdose deaths, which continue to occur at unprecedented levels in Maryland.

Founded in March 2017, BRIDGES Coalition for Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) is a statewide Baltimore-based advocacy coalition working to end overdose and criminalization by promoting safe spaces, dignity, health, and justice for people who use drugs. BRIDGES was founded with funding from the Drug Policy Alliance and Open Society Foundations, international resources for drug policy reform and reparative justice for communities harmed by the war on drugs. Our coalition was created to address needs named by Maryland policymakers during committee hearings and delegation meetings in 2016, when then-Delegate Dan Morhaim first presented this bill to authorize OPS. **Since the bill was first introduced, Maryland has lost over 17,000 individuals to fatal overdose. We cannot overemphasize the significance of these losses on loved ones, communities, and our state as a whole.**

BRIDGES Coalition is dedicated to ensuring Maryland State authorizes OPS. For the past six years, our coalition has led public education and community mobilization efforts via monthly community organizing meetings, mock demonstrations of OPS, community dialogues, informational hearings with the Baltimore City Council, online messaging campaigns, an [educational video series](#), focus groups, surveys with various stakeholders, and ten Maryland General Assembly committee hearings. Each year, we host several events in partnership with places of worship, treatment programs, neighborhood associations, cultural centers, and public officials -- all with the same goal of addressing potential community concerns around overdose prevention sites being set up across our state. We engage Marylanders new to the concept of Overdose Prevention Sites, and every person has walked away with a deeper understanding and support for these life-saving services.

**Maryland needs Overdose Prevention Sites; indoor spaces where individuals can consume pre-obtained drugs in the presence of trained professionals with immediate access to life-saving interventions, medical care, emotional support, and non-judgmental therapeutic relationships.**

We recognize that OPS are not the sole solution to the overdose epidemic and could never replace treatment services. OPS are a crisis intervention positioned within the continuum of care to reduce overdose rates. To most effectively save lives from the growing overdose epidemic, Marylanders need and deserve overdose prevention sites that are community and peer-run, grounded in mutual aid efforts, and implemented with a social justice framework.

**For over 30 years, it has been proven globally that overdose prevention sites save lives. In all 200+ OPS around the world, in which millions of supervised drug injections have occurred, no one has died of a fatal overdose.** We urge the General Assembly to authorize the proposed Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program, which mirrors these programs already established across the world, including two in the United States.

**We ask that the House Health and Government Operations Committee give HB953 a favorable report.**

For more information about the BRIDGES Coalition for Overdose Prevention Sites, please contact Rajani Gudlavalleti at [rajani@baltimoreharmreduction.org](mailto:rajani@baltimoreharmreduction.org).

