

House Health & Government Operations Committee
House Bill 953 - Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program
March 7, 2023
SUPPORT

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), we would like to express our support for House Bill 953. As social workers, we help meet the needs of – and empower – all people, with particular attention to those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.¹ Unfortunately, we are living in a precarious time where a great deal of people fall into these categories. With income inequality greater than any time since before the great depression, many people are dying from what are referred to as “diseases of despair,” including from substances.² Those people are worthy of help.

Studies have found Overdose Prevention Sites to reduce the number of overdose deaths and transmission rates of infectious diseases without increasing drug trafficking or crime in the relevant areas.³ These sites are also in demand. A Johns Hopkins study recently found that 77% of people who use drugs who were surveyed, said they would use such sites if they were available.⁴ Safe consumption sites have been shown to save lives and tax dollars. Additionally, for substance users who want to seek help, overdose prevention sites can provide immediate health assistance, such as getting wound care, and provide referrals to other resources in the community.

We ask that you give a favorable report on House Bill 953.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth DeMartino, LCSW
Executive Director, NASW-MD

¹ <https://www.socialworkers.org/about/ethics/code-of-ethics/code-of-ethics-english>

² <https://blog.petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2018/07/22/diseases-of-despair-the-role-of-policy-and-law/>

³ <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-wants-new-approaches-combat-synthetic-and-injectable-drugs>

⁴ <http://www.baltimoresun.com/health/bs-hs-safe-consumption-spaces-20190605-story.html>