



March 9, 2023

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senate Bill 546 (Criminal Procedure - Medical Emergency - Immunity) - FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti-sex worker policies. As a certified Overdose Response Program, Naloxone distributor, and syringe service program, we have provided essential health care services across the state for years. To supplement the life-saving services provided by us and dozens of other harm reduction programs across the state, BHRC supports Senate Bill 546 (Criminal Procedure - Medical Emergency - Immunity).

Our community and loved ones are facing an increasingly deadly overdose epidemic. During 2021, drug and alcohol related intoxication deaths in Maryland reached a staggering 2,824 fatalities.¹ Maryland legislators have taken laudable steps to reduce the devastation of the overdose crisis, but they do not go far enough to halt the overdose epidemic. The General Assembly has approved measures to expand access to the life-saving medication naloxone, increase behavioral health treatment, and establish syringe services programs throughout the state. While these essential policies have increased opportunities for health and safety, the situation remains dire.

This bill is an essential next step in strengthening the public health and safety impact of Maryland's 2015 "Good Samaritan" law. Maryland's existing Good Samaritan law is a life-saving measure with a State-sponsored public education campaign whose message is "don't run – call 911." If passed, SB546 will clarify that the survivor of the overdose or medical emergency is provided the same immunity from arrest, charge and prosecution as the person calling for help.

In 2022, we trained over 3,000 Marylanders in responding to an overdose and distributed over 10,000 doses of naloxone. We connect people to these life-saving services while meeting our neighbors where they live, work, and use drugs; in four Baltimore neighborhoods with high overdose fatality rates and across Maryland via our state-authorized mail-order naloxone program. We have heard from community members, naloxone trainees, and syringe service program participants time and again -- they will not call 911 if they believe police will arrest, harass, or harm them or those they love. Concurring with this deep mistrust of law enforcement, BHRC cannot in good conscience rely

¹Opioid Operational Command Center (2022). Maryland Overdose Dashboard.

on the existing Good Samaritan law until our loved ones who may experience overdose are protected with the immunities listed in this proposed bill SB546.

We hope for a day where protections for people at the scene of an overdose are even further expanded. Doing so would more effectively save lives. However, we know this clarification is a needed step in the right direction to reduce the harm of police interaction at the scene of an overdose. **For these reasons, we urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to give SB546 a favorable report.**

For more information about Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition or our position, please contact our Director of Mobilization, Rajani Gudlavalleti at rajani@baltimoreharmreduction.org