



**Testimony in Favor of SB 762
Judicial Proceedings Committee**

Greetings Legislators,

I am writing as the executive director of one of Baltimore's top non-profit that organizes and promotes self-advocacy in partnership with low to moderate-income residents who are directly impacted by systems of injustice. We are in strong support of HB 953 to authorize overdose prevention sites (OPS) in the State of Maryland.

We were founded in 2010 with the purpose of organizing members in stigmatized, underserved and over-policed communities of Baltimore City. This mission led us to hire a spitfire, legendary organizer William Miller.

Our organizing in Baltimore's Gilmor homes and McCulloh Homes (Baltimore's 40th Legislative District) provide essential education to drug users and the families and communities that know, love and depend upon them. This education has led our people to say of OPS, "Yes, In my neighborhood!" They cannot refuse the opportunity to save lives, which far outweighs the stigma that causes people to act or vote counter to harm reduction efforts.

We humbly, yet stridently ask that this committee takes a stand against death. Take a stand against further harm and against unsubstantiated stigma. Take a stand to make Maryland a leader in preventing overdoses. If the number of homicide deaths is a public health crisis - which we argue they are - then surely overdose deaths which are double to triple those deaths should be addressed with the same sense of urgency. We have a solution, and that is OPS.

In the hundreds of safe use sites across the world, there have been no deaths due to overdoses. Overdose prevention sites save lives. As Mr. Will Miller Sr said to you last year: "The question is simple, if you dare to answer it: Do you want to save lives, or don't you?!"

You do. Show it with your support of SB 762.

Thank you.

Jess Ahart
Executive Director,
Communities United