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HB 953

March 7, 2023

TO: Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee
FROM: Nina Themelis, Interim Director of Mayor's Office of Government Relations
RE: House Bill 953 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program
POSITION: Support

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and Members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 953.

HB 953 will authorize the establishment of an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program (OIDPSP) by a community-based organization. Establishment of OIDPSP will provide a safe space for people who use drugs (PWUD) to consume pre-purchased substances in a supervised setting. Often staffed by healthcare workers, case managers, and/or peers, consumers will have access to wraparound services to address their needs.

According to the Maryland Department of Health's 2020 annual report, Maryland's overdose deaths rose nearly 18% compared to the previous year.¹ It is no surprise to public health professionals that the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the opioid epidemic. It is imperative that we take these bold steps and save the lives of our loved ones. The concept of OIDPSP may be new to the United States, but it is common practice elsewhere. Nearly 200 sites are operational in 14 countries, none of which have ever had an overdose death.²

Over 100 peer-reviewed studies have shown the positive impacts the sites have on communities and those who use them.² Saving lives with Naloxone (also known as "Narcan") is one of the most immediate benefits. However, the benefits do not stop there. These studies have demonstrated a reduction in HIV and Hepatitis C transmission rates, an increase in access to treatment, a connection to social and medical services, a reduction in the amount and frequency clients use drugs, a safe place to find connection and care without stigma or fear of criminalization, cost savings for the medical system(s), and a reduction in syringe litter and/or other drug paraphernalia.² In just the first year of operation, OnPoint in New York City reversed more than 600 overdoses and has had 0 deaths at their location.³

For these reasons, the BCA respectfully request a **favorable** report on HB 953.

¹ Maryland Department of Health. (2021). Unintentional Drug and Alcohol-Related Intoxication Deaths. Retrieved from https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Overdose/Annual_2020_Drug_Intox_Report.pdf

² The Drug Policy Alliance. (n.d.). Overdose Prevention Centers. Retrieved from <https://drugpolicy.org/issues/supervised-consumption-services>

³ OnPoint NYC. (2021). About Us. Retrieved from <https://onpointnyc.org/>