



Maryland Youth Advisory Council  
c/o Governor's Office of Crime  
Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services  
100 Community Place,  
Crownsville, MD 21032

Grace Minakowski, *Chair*  
Will O'Donnell, *Vice-Chair*  
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

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March 8th, 2023

**Re: SB 103 | Overdose Awareness Day**

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in the state of Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

Overdose and drug addiction is a crisis. As identified by the CDC and World Health Organization, overdoses transcend age, race, and gender of Marylanders. Driven largely by the use of illegally manufactured drugs like fentanyl, over 103,000 people died in the US from overdoses in the 12-month period preceding August 2023, with regions with large wealth disparities being disproportionately affected by the epidemic.<sup>1</sup> This same data found that rates of drug treatment for racial and ethnic minorities was lower when compared to the white demographic. Zooming in on Maryland's, in the 12 month period leading up to September 2023, 130 young people under the age of 25, out of 2596 total Marylanders, died of an overdose. Further, the rate of overdoses among youth in 2020 doubled, rising to an additional 20% compared to the ten years before the pandemic.<sup>2 3</sup> It is clear our communities cannot rest until the number of overdose fatalities in Maryland reaches zero.

Overdose prevention methods like increasing the availability of addiction therapy/medical intervention, decreasing/monitoring the prescription of addictive medication/opioids, & limiting the sale of over-the-counter opioids/drugs are proven to be effective, yet less than 10% of people utilize these available treatments.<sup>4</sup> As a state, we must make it known that help is *always* available, no matter what stage of drug addiction one finds themselves in. **SB 103** proclaims Overdose Awareness Day (celebrated globally on August 31st every year) as an official day in Maryland, helping to raise awareness about drug overdose, reduce stigma about addiction, and educate those struggling with addiction/the effects of addiction on treatment options. **SB 103** requires no fiscal burden or administrative bloat; the bill simply seeks to reduce the feelings of shame, guilt, and isolation that those harmed by drug addiction may feel. Recognizing Overdose Awareness Day in Maryland sends the clear message that our government stands

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Rossen LM, Sutton P. Provisional drug overdose death counts. National Center for Health Statistics. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland's overdose data dashboard. (n.d.). <https://stopoverdose.maryland.gov/dashboard/>

<sup>3</sup> Adolescent drug overdose deaths rose exponentially for the first time in history during the COVID pandemic. (2022, April 12). UCLA Health. <https://www.uclahealth.org/news/adolescent-drug-overdose-deaths-rose-exponentially-first>

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization: WHO. (2023, August 29). *Opioid overdose*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/opioid-overdose>

in solidarity with victims of lethal or non-lethal overdose and seeks to lead our state into a healthy, safer future. The Council has voted in favor of supporting **SB 103**, as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- a. Efforts to eliminate illegal use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs (Section IV, Clause B)
- b. Providing youth access to drug counseling (Section IV, Clause C)

The Maryland General Assembly can only benefit from enacting **SB 103**. In order to shape a more positive future for our young people, we must address the real and growing epidemic of drug abuse. Marylanders, young and old alike, deserve to know where/how to seek treatment for drug abuse and to operate in a society destigmatized of addiction-related guilt. For these reasons, the Council adamantly supports **SB 103**, and respectfully requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Minakowski', with a stylized, cursive script.

Grace Minakowski, Chair  
Maryland Youth Advisory Council