

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 751

February 29, 2024

Maryland General Assembly
Senator Pamela Beidle
Chair, Finance Committee

**RE: SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0751
(Public Health – Opioid Restitution Advisory Council and Fund – Revisions) FAVORABLE**

FROM: John Torsch, Baltimore County, Legislative District 8

Good Day Chair Beidle and Committee Members,

My name is John Torsch, I am the co-founder and program director of The Daniel Carl Torsch Foundation (DCTF). We advocate for harm reduction, addiction treatment, and recovery communities. Myself, and the DCTF support Senate Bill SB 0751, which would encourage transparency, and require a small percentage of the Opioid Restitution Funds to be earmarked for recovery support services.

The DCTF, leads a 6 person community outreach team made up of peer recovery specialists with lived experience battling addiction. We have been a part of introducing several pieces of legislation that were signed into law, including the 2013 Overdose Response Program, which led to the standing orders for Naloxone that we have today. In 2010, my younger brother Danny died in my home of a multi-drug overdose. Since then I have represented our foundation in Danny's memory. It is essential to share that I have lost more friends and family members than I can count to drug overdoses, drug-related health complications, and violence related to drugs.

As a peer recovery specialist and person in long term recovery from drug addiction, my life is literally "all addiction all the time." This broad spectrum of experience has given me a unique perspective on the drug syndemic that is ravaging our state and country. Without a shadow of a doubt, the recovery support services that myself, our team of peers and similar organizations provide are vital to the successful recovery of everyone that we serve. From helping people obtain identification and navigate complicated social services systems, to providing them with tangible supplies and being that voice of support in their darkest moments, we are dedicated to helping people improve their quality of life.

The recovery housing funding that we distribute is also critical to this success because as we all know, recovery begins with safe and stable housing. By maintaining a close relationship with both clients receiving funding, and the people running these programs, we are able to provide wrap-around support and accountability to these programs so they treat everyone with dignity and utilize best practices.

Funding sources for recovery support services like these as well as the recovery housing funding are not consistent. Small organizations like DCTF are often put up against much larger corporate organizations that have net worths of hundreds of millions of dollars, and are able to provide billable services. This unfair competition means that smaller organizations miss out on funding for these services. As we have seen in dozens of other states, even though there are clear Federal guidelines on how these funds are to be spent, these guidelines are not always followed and it is difficult to actually see where the money has gone. That is why SB 0751 is so important. This will guarantee a steady stream of funding to small community based organizations in order to provide the services these funds were meant to provide.

Lest we forget the 10s of thousands of people who died because of the greed and reckless dishonesty from pharmaceutical companies that were held accountable, and forced to pay this fine. This is blood money, paid in the memory of those we've loved and lost. These funds MUST not be squandered, they MUST be used to save lives with evidence based practices. Maryland has an excellent reputation for its progressive and person centered actions that our legislators have taken over the years to reduce drug related deaths and improve quality of life for those living with addiction.

I/We respectfully ask that you give SB 0751 a favorable report to stem the rising tide of overdose deaths in Maryland and help improve the quality of life for those living with addiction.

Thank you,

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