

The Honorable Mary Washington

U.S Maryland State Senate

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Washington

I am writing to you as a constituent and a nursing student from Johns Hopkins University regarding the Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program. I urge you to support this legislation to authorize the establishment of Overdose Prevention Services and advocate for this bill as needed during the senate hearing on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Providing a location for the consumption of pre-obtained drugs is an imperative harm reduction strategy that can positively impact Baltimore's community, especially since drug use and overdoses are so prevalent in our city. Harm reduction is a way of approaching and caring for people who use drugs that emphasizes their dignity, humanity, and autonomy to reduce the harm associated with substance use. It uses practical strategies to improve individual and community well-being and health; a myriad of research demonstrates that harm reduction programs, specifically the syringe and naloxone distribution services that are typically offered at Overdose Prevention sites, are associated with reduced morbidity, mortality, and transmission of infectious diseases while also improving individual health outcomes and services engagement. People who utilize these centers are provided other harm reduction services, basic needs (eg, housing or food), medical services, and addiction treatment. These centers have the potential to save lives and reduce the stigma and discrimination surrounding drug use.

The first two Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) in the U.S were operated by the nonprofit OnPoint NYC, and staff intervened 125 times to mitigate overdose risk, including 19 administrations of the opioid blocker naloxone, within just the first two months of being open. An opioid overdose is a common but fatal reality of drug use, and administering naloxone as soon as possible is the most effective way to save someone's life. The prevalence of recreational opioid use in Baltimore City is a public health crisis and is the leading cause of death for Americans under the age of 50. In 2020, there were 1,028 drug and alcohol-related deaths in Baltimore, 962 of which were related to opioid use. Had these people been able to use drugs in a safe environment, surrounded by a staff trained in how to respond to an overdose and administer Narcan, these deaths could have been prevented. A study from 2019 illustrates that frequenting an OPS is associated with a lower risk of death from drug use. I urge you to support the Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program, which would save so many lives and be a great step in combatting the opioid crisis. If you or your staff would like additional information regarding this program, please contact me directly at [jtebay1@jh.edu](mailto:jtebay1@jh.edu). I look forward to keeping you informed on this issue and working with your office in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jordan Tebay, MSN candidate