



SB 427 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Committee: Finance

Date: February 16, 2024

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. Using their personal experience as parents, caregivers and other loved ones, our staff provide emotional support, resource connection and systems navigation as well as support groups and educational trainings and workshops.

Last year we served nearly 5,000 Families of a loved one with a behavioral health need. 20% of those families have a loved one with substance use and co-occurring disorders. We support this bill for the following reasons.

- Christi Green- Executive Director, MCF

One of the reasons Christi was drawn to MCF was the work of Family Peer Support Specialists not only with families with mental health challenges, but the critical work with substance use disorder. Christi and her husband were caregivers of their young adult nephew, Kameron, who was in recovery. When Kameron started showing signs of using again, they felt alone, stressed, and over their heads. Every waking moment was spent trying to locate Kameron, always wondering where he was, scared for him. After spending time setting boundaries, assisting him with finding a job, getting him on a wait list for therapy, ensuring he had everything he needed at home—Kameron disappeared one day only for them to later receive a call from the morgue to come and identify his body. It was beyond devastating. They often wonder now if there had been a safe place for him to “use” the “one last time” as he told friends, if he would be alive today knowing that these safe consumption sites, for example, in New York, have not had a single death.

There was hope for Kameron. He was a young man with so much potential who is severely missed by his family. If we can keep even one more person safe, can educate and provide resources for just one more person, then we can help another family not go through the devastation that Christi’s family went through.



- Stephanie Hutter-Thomas, PhD, CPH, RPS

Director of Peer & Organizational Development, Maryland Coalition of Families
Founder & CEO, Appalachian Recovery Concepts, LLC
Co-Investigator, Mountain Maryland Forward, University of Maryland CESAR

Stephanie identifies as a person with lived experience as the caregiver of multiple immediate family members with OUD/AUD and other behavioral health challenges.

“Safe Consumption sites exist on almost every street corner as some of the most profitable businesses around, and we call them bars or night clubs. People have been indulging in alcohol use, both socially and problematically since the discovery of fermentation. As a society, we support and promote this social norm through our patronage of restaurants, bars, clubs, and other venues who serve alcohol, yet condemn the extension of such tolerance to those who use drugs. People (including adolescents & young adults) will do what they want to do, with or without these safety mechanisms, but offering safety to people who use drugs is an act of unconditional love. Safe consumption sites not only reduce overdose rates significantly, but these sites also help prevent other violent crimes. By providing a safe space for people who are under the influence, we reduce the likelihood of these individuals experiencing violent crimes in the streets. For example, using in a safe consumption space reduces the likelihood of being raped or assaulted, while under the influence.”

- Ashley Tauler-Policy and Advocacy Associate, MCF

Ashley started her journey at Maryland Coalition of Families as a Substance Use family peer support specialist. She has cared for loved ones with behavioral health and substance use disorders. Alcohol was the cause of one of her family members death. He had drowned when his car proceeded off a bridge due to being intoxicated. The shock of that phone call her family received from the state police is a reality families face today with the rise of overdose deaths.

The costs of losing a loved one to an overdose is insurmountable and unmeasurable. An overdose prevention site can be lifesaving and would provide a safe space with support and resources. Overdose numbers are not just numbers they are fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, friends and more. Overdose deaths affect all systems, not just family systems.



Christi Green
Executive Director

Stephanie Hutter-Thomas, PhD, CPH, RPS
Director of Peer & Organizational Development

Ashley Tauler, CA
Policy and Advocacy Associate

Maryland Coalition of Families

8950 State Route 108, Suite 223

Columbia MD, 21045