

SUPPORT FOR SB427: PUBLIC HEALTH – OVERDOSE AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE PREVENTION SERVICES PROGRAM

Finance Committee Chair Beidle, Vice-Chair Klausmeier, and Members:

Despite all efforts, the opioid/overdose crisis continues. Too many Marylanders have died and too many are suffering from the ravages of addiction, and this has been going on for decades. It's not just those who are plagued with this disease. There are the larger adverse impacts on society: crime, healthcare costs, damages to communities, innocent victims, and families.

As a career Emergency Medicine Physician, as an appointed member of the State Behavioral Health Care Council and the Baltimore County Behavioral Healthcare Council, as faculty at George Washington University and Morgan State, and as a former legislator, I am appreciative of the steps taken by governments, NGO's, public health experts, front-line workers, and others to stem this tragic tide. But it's clearly not enough.

THAT'S WHY I URGE YOU TO SUPPORT SB427: PUBLIC HEALTH – OVERDOSE AND INFECTIOUS DISEASE PREVENTION SERVICES PROGRAM.

This approach has been documented to save lives because a rescuer is always present, and there have been zero overdose deaths in the facilities currently operating. In addition, these facilities reduce disease, lower crime rates, and motivate people to get into treatment. This would be an effective tool for us here in Maryland, based on studies from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and others. The legislation has numerous safeguards to be sure any program meets standards, is located appropriately, and is subject to monitoring by the Health Department. Further, it's a 3-year pilot program with a study, so that it can be properly assessed over time. Last, based on the Fiscal Note from 2023, there is no fiscal impact for the state.

I understand concerns some may have. These are similar to ones that were raised when needle exchange was first proposed. But as it turned out, needle exchange works to reduce disease spread and discarded needles.

No one action or program will turn the corner on this tragic and devastating crisis by itself, and so diverse approaches are needed. That's why all available tools should be employed, especially ones like this that are proven and evidence based. Enacting SB427 is another important step that can help.

It's my understanding that the House is ready to act on this but is waiting for the Senate to indicate its support, starting with the Senate Finance Committee. We cannot allow another year to go by with Marylanders dying who could have been saved. Please vote for SB427.

Please contact me if I can provide further information.

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