

**SB 427 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services  
Program (Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS))**

**Committee: Finance**

**Date: February 12, 2024**

**Position: FAV**

I am testifying FAV for Senate Bill 0427

This bill would have benefited my ex-husband, the father of my children. My ex was introduced to Percocet by his dentist in his early 20's. He had some routine dental work done, and this particular dentist prescribed pain meds like they were candy. Despite my warning, my ex took the medication and liked the way he felt on them. He started his losing battle from that point on. He suffered from alcoholism as a teenager and never received treatment or help. In fact, his mother found his empty beer cans and simply piled them on top of his bed as her way of saying "I found them, now clean it up before your father sees them." He was self-medicating to drown out the pain and anguish from the physical abuse he sustained at the hands of his father. Sadly, he never received any therapy or treatment and carried this dark secret with him through his young adult life. Over the years he self-medicated but it came to a point where he became violent with me and our children and we divorced out of necessity for safety. He returned to his family, an adult who was broken and suffering. But without my caretaking that he grew accustomed to over the course of our 7 years of marriage, he started to decline again. He had stolen, lied and even became physical with his family, so they cast him out for a third and final time in his life, leaving him to live homeless in abandoned buildings in Baltimore. So desperate at one point, he admitted he wanted to die and was placed inpatient, but when the hospital became full, he was kicked to the curb yet again. With no continued substance use or mental health support or treatment. And after that, he lost all hope. This set-in stone his fate. There would be no more holidays together with family or his children. No more hope to be found. Because my ex got ahold of fentanyl and died alone, face down in his vomit in a seedy apartment with a filthy shared bathroom. No one knows if he was even aware that he ingested fentanyl. His death certificate states the cause of death is "fentanyl and ethanol." My children lost their father a long time prior to this, but now, because there was no real safe support for him, they lost him for life. I believe that if he received proper help, mental health and substance use support, real resources, and solid treatment, he would be alive today. He passed away at the age of 40, on May 3, 2018, in Pasadena, Maryland to the fentanyl crisis that is killing so many in our state. I believe that if there was a safe place for him to go, one that addressed substance use and trauma and mental illness, that would treat him until he was ready to be released to the world, he would be alive today. Instead of hiding his "dirty little secret" of addiction that he was forced to do due to the stigma that "drug addicts are losers and lazy" he could have been able to seek the help he deserved and be given the chance to heal. And if that stigma was dropped, a life would have been saved, correction, a family would have been saved. I ask you to truly step back, put yourself in the shoes of these individuals that are alone, scared, shamed, and struggling, and consider the dire need for more viable treatment options and safe houses for them to get back up on their own to feet to survive. No one should do this alone. No one should die alone, face

down in their vomit, leaving behind 2 young children that to this day cry for what could have been. Please take this story with you, carry it in your mind as you make this crucial life or death decisions for the residents of Maryland. I thank you for your valuable time.

Kindest Regards,

Jodi Gardiner

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