



# Strengthening the Mid-Atlantic Region for Tomorrow

Four States, One Region, Infinite Possibilities

February 29, 2024

Chair Senator Pamela Beidle  
Vice Chair Senator Katherine Klausmeier  
3 East Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB751 – Favorable

Dear Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Klausmeier and Committee Members,

We are writing today in support of SB 751, to require the Secretary of Health to present decisions for the allocations of money from the Opioid Restitution Fund to the Opioid Restitution Fund Advisory Council; requiring the Maryland Department of Health to post on the Department's website certain information regarding allocations of money from the Fund; requiring in each fiscal year, that at least 25% of the money in the Fund be used to support community-based recovery organizations in the State; establishing certain reporting requirements; etc.

The Strengthening the Mid-Atlantic Region for Tomorrow (SMART) is a non-profit group that supports primarily Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware on legislative and policy issues affecting the Mid-Atlantic Region. SMART has 15 working groups comprised of industry and community leaders across the 4 states in healthcare, veteran's issues, and workforce development.

We are gravely concerned about the on-going opioid overdose epidemic and the rise of substance use disorder, due to the disproportionate impact on the region due to the I-95 corridor. SMART has been broadening the outreach with our healthcare working group to support consistent implementation of best practices across the region to combat this crisis.

As you may know, provisional drug overdose statistics from the CDC indicate that for the 12-month period ending in September 2023, ~111,000 Americans died from drug overdoses, which includes Maryland's ~2500 deaths, an almost 3% increase from the previous year.<sup>1</sup> SMART understands the challenges Maryland currently faces, as one of the most impacted in the nation. Not only are these losses unnecessary, but there are also enormous direct and indirect costs to families, healthcare systems, employers and society that may be greatly mitigated through existing channels. According to the CDC, the U.S. economic cost of opioid use disorder (\$471B) and fatal opioid overdose (\$550B) during 2017 totaled just over \$1T.<sup>2</sup>

Maryland's Opioid Restitution Fund has provided an opportunity to establish, promote, and sustain programs for the prevention and treatment of opioid use disorders. These programs, new and existing, are critical to overcoming the opioid epidemic.

SMART understands that opioid use prevention is priority, but it is vital for recovery initiatives to be recognized with similar importance. Recovery is highly personal process, and has proven to not be one-size-fits-all as far as the pathways taken for those who are successful. While clinical treatments and medications have proven effective, they often are not solely responsible for one's recover. Support systems, including peer, family, faith-based, and self-care, have proven their efficacy, as recovery is a lifestyle change and requires one to maintain continual growth and improvement. Further, community and faith leaders are often the first points of contact when individuals and families are in crisis, and they will often turn to these contacts before reaching out to professionals. These human networks are critical expanded safety net for initial points of contact, and if a person in recovery faces a setback.

Therefore, as part of Maryland's holistic approach to overcoming the opioid epidemic, community-based recovery organizations should be considered, and given priority, as an integral part of the response. Funding to support the establishment and sustainment of these organizations is vital to expand access to individuals and families that may lack resources otherwise.

SMART acknowledges, and applauds, Maryland for the great lengths taken to ensure a comprehensive approach to the crisis, and the consideration provided to securing equitable access to overdose and addiction prevention and treatment

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7015a1.htm#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20economic%20cost%20of,during%202017%20totalled%20%241%2C021%20billion.>



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services. Our hope is that Maryland continues to be at the forefront in mitigating overdose deaths, and the actions encourage other states to follow suit.

Thank you for your consideration of the passage of SB751.

Sincerely,

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