

February 20, 2024

The Honorable Senator Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: SUPPORT of Senate Bill 427
(Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program) -
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Beidle and Senate Finance Committee Members,

My name is red nesbitt and I am a social worker at SPARC Women's Center, and I am writing to support Senate Bill 427 "Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program". SB427 will allow community-based organizations to establish overdose prevention programs to reduce overdose deaths, which continue to occur at alarming levels in Maryland.

SPARC is a harm reduction drop-in center and outreach program serving women and gender minorities engaging in substance use, sex work, and survival economies in Southwest Baltimore. Every day we see the toll of poverty, trauma, and organized abandonment on our neighbors and community. Every week we hear of another vibrant and beautiful and loved community member dying, often alone, of a preventable death. This has long-lasting generational effects on children, families, friends, and the broader community. The approaches Maryland is trying are not enough, our overdose death numbers necessitate bold action. Overdose and infectious disease prevention programs are bold, grounded, and backed by evidence. Please, look to those of us on the ground who are the first responders, the care workers, the friends and families and partners of those who have died. We respectfully urge you to vote favorably on this bill.

In 2022, we lost 2,587 Marylanders to fatal overdoses. These are our neighbors and these deaths are preventable, not inevitable. We urge the Maryland General Assembly to authorize overdose and infectious disease prevention services, an intervention proven for over 30 years of research to decrease overdose deaths. The proposed Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program mirrors the 200 such programs already established across the world in 14 countries, including two in the United States. In all of OPS around the world, in which millions of supervised drug use interactions have occurred, **no one has died of a fatal overdose.**

This is an emergency. We urge you to act now. **We ask that the Senate Finance Committee give SB427 a favorable report.**

For more information about SPARC Women's Center or this position, please contact red nesbitt at jnesbit5@jh.edu

