

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Chair Peña-Melnyk  
Health & Government Operations Committee Members

**RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 1096  
(Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program) -  
FAVORABLE**

My name is red nesbitt and I am a social worker at SPARC Women’s Center, and I am writing to support Senate Bill 1096 “Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program”. HB1096 enables community-based organizations to establish overdose prevention programs to reduce overdose deaths, which continue to occur at alarming levels in Maryland.

As a young person who used drugs and engaged in sex work, I was afraid to share aspect of my survival with others. Because of this valid fear, criminalization, and discrimination, I wasn’t able to access supplies, information, and relationships that could help me be safe. I’m alive writing this to you because of luck. No one should have to be lucky to survive. My journey led me to study social work so I could advocate with and for people like me (and people very different from me) all of whom deserve safety and support.

At SPARC, a vibrant harm reduction outreach and drop-in center for women who use drugs and do sex work in Southwest Baltimore, I light a candle each time someone I work with dies. This occurs every week, including this morning as I write this testimony. The loss of our friends, colleagues, and clients deprives our community of their contributions, care, and dreams. They leave behind loved ones - including pets, and each death has a profound ripple effect on community mental health. Additionally, non-fatal overdoses often result in preventable brain injuries. In essence, overdose prevention programs are about so much more than drug use - they’re a form of community health and generational wellness.

Nurses, social workers, outreach workers, people who use drugs, parents — year after year we tell you of our immense grief and concern for our friends, our neighbors, our family. We present decades of evidence that back these practices and loudly proclaim our readiness to do this work. We *are* doing this lifesaving work already except for the arguably most important time - when someone can overdose. Please, look to those of us on the ground who are the first responders in this crisis. We urge you to vote favorably on this bill. Don’t you want to live in a state that sees a drastic reduction in overdose deaths? I certainly do.

This is an emergency. We urge you to act now. **We ask that the Senate Finance Committee give HB1096 a favorable report.**

For more information about SPARC Women's Center or this position, please contact red nesbitt at [jnesbit5@jh.edu](mailto:jnesbit5@jh.edu)