



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA)

To the Health and Government Operations

Chair: Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk

February 28, 2024

House Bill 1096: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 1096: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Fatal overdoses continue to be a serious issue within Maryland. As a result of the opioid epidemic, the number of fatal overdoses has soared and there is not a clear indication if or when they may significantly reduce. Fatal overdoses not only affect the individual, but also families, communities, and the economy. Due to its widespread impact, it is imperative that Maryland implements evidence-based practices that break the cycle of addiction. One common and effective approach is through harm reduction. Integrating health promotion, risk reduction, and infection prevention, harm reduction programs have proven to be successful in reducing the stigma around addiction, fatal overdoses, illicit drug use, and has increased access to medical and social services illicit drug users need but may not seek out on their own (National Institute on Drug Abuse, n.d.). By treating overdoses at the location of the program, it can lower the number of hospital admissions due to overdoses and consequently reduce the burden on Maryland's overcrowded emergency rooms. Harm reduction will also target reducing the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV or hepatitis by providing clean supplies to prevent the reuse and sharing of unsanitary needles. With the passing of HB1096, the Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program will reduce the use of drugs in public, slow the transmission of infectious diseases, and reduce burden on local emergency rooms and hospitals throughout Maryland. According to the Maryland Overdose Data Dashboard, the majority of counties that had a large increase in fatal overdoses within the last year all belonged to rural areas (2023). Establishing programs in urban, rural, and suburban areas where illicit drug use is high will reduce barriers to care for the underserved communities who need better healthcare. Due to the many benefits the Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program will provide to rural Maryland, the Maryland Rural Health Association supports the passing of HB1096.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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National Institute on Drug Abuse. (n.d.). *Harm reduction*. <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/harm-reduction>

Maryland Overdose Data Dashboard. (2023). *Percent change in fatal overdoses (All Substances): 12 months ending in September (2022 vs. 2023*)*. Maryland Department of Health. <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/799cc6c21cf94e89a174fa06532febd9>