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Date: March 1, 2024

Re: HB 1096- Overdose Prevention Services Authorization bill

Position: SUPPORT

To: Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1096, Overdose Prevention Services Authorization bill. I believe this bill is a crucial step towards decreasing preventable overdose deaths and boosting public health and safety in Maryland.

I am here to represent myself, having spent my career in law enforcement, and as a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership. LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety, addressing the root causes of crime, and working toward healing police-community relations.

As law enforcement, it is our duty, first and foremost, to save lives. It is terrible being called to a scene where a person using drugs has suffered a fatal overdose. Police not only witness these awful scenes, but then also have to break the news to the victims' families. So police have to deal with the emotional fallout from overdose, yet we do not currently have the tools to deal with the root causes of addiction and overdose.

And this happens all too often: [more than 1 million people have died from a drug overdose since 1999](#). Fortunately, there is a tool that we can use to prevent overdose in Maryland – the Overdose Prevention Site. These sites are facilities where someone can bring in their own drugs, receive clean needles and other supplies, and consume them in an open booth where if they overdose, a staff person will be able to save their life. There are [more than 147 OPSs around the](#)

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Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

[world](#) that help people recover from overdose, test their drugs for fentanyl, and connect to treatment and counseling. In 2021, two overdose prevention sites opened up in New York City, where staff [prevented 636 overdose deaths](#) and [averted 39,422 instances of public drug use](#) in its first year. In addition to [significantly reducing overdose deaths in their local communities](#), OPSs in New York City have also been shown to reduce [discarded syringes](#) and [crime](#). In more than two decades of Overdose Prevention Services operation, no OPS user has ever died of overdose or contracted HIV or Hepatitis C due to needle-sharing in these facilities.

To reduce preventable overdose deaths, it is time for Maryland to join New York City by passing H. 1096, the Overdose Prevention Services Authorization bill. This legislation would allow community-based organizations to establish Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services programs. Each program would run an overdose prevention site, while also providing access to naloxone, a drug that can reverse opioid overdose, and overdose prevention education.

In addition to reducing overdose deaths, overdose prevention sites can reduce health risks for police officers. We all benefit when a needle in someone's pocket or on the sidewalk is less likely to transmit HIV. Officers benefit in particular because we often have to reach into someone's bag or search through a trash can, knowing that a needle stick could transmit a life-threatening virus. I know officers who have been stuck by syringes, and they and their families suffered terrible stress while waiting to hear the results of their blood test. Indeed, research shows that [OPSs decrease HIV and Hepatitis C infections related to injection drug use](#). OPSs would reduce the transmission of communicable diseases, allowing law enforcement to protect ourselves and our communities more safely.

As officers, we understand the concern of some lawmakers that the establishment of safe overdose prevention sites may lead to an increase in crime and drug use. However, just as research has shown that OPSs decrease overdose deaths, it has also proven that OPSs do not increase crime. A recent [study found no significant increases in violent crimes](#) recorded by the police or calls for emergency service in NYC neighborhoods where the two OPSs are located, but rather a significant decline in low-level drug issues near the OPSs, with a [82.7% reduction in arrests for drug possession](#). New York City has proven that OPSs can save lives while promoting public health and safety.

In short, authorizing overdose prevention sites in Maryland is a common-sense next step to reduce overdose deaths and promote public health and safety. Entire communities will benefit from OPSs, from our police officers and first responders to people who use drugs and people who see drug use in their community. As drug overdose deaths continue to cause tragedies for families across our state, it is time for Maryland to take the next step to prevent overdose deaths and increase access to treatment.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience in support of this bill.

Sincerely,

Chief Edward C. Jackson
Annapolis Police Department
Speaker, Law Enforcement Action Partnership