



February 20, 2024

**Senate Finance Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

*SB 427 - Public Health-Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program*

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

**BHSB strongly supports SB 427 - Public Health-Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.** This bill would authorize the establishment of Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services (OPS) Programs to help reduce fatal overdose in our communities.

The number of overdose deaths in Maryland has skyrocketed in the last ten years. About 2,500 people die of fatal overdose in the state every year, including 1,000 who die in Baltimore City.<sup>1</sup> Preventing this unconscionable loss of life must be the state’s top priority.

The OPS Program proposed in this legislation mirrors the programs established across the world. These programs are proven public health initiatives with over 100 OPS programs currently active in 60 jurisdictions across the world. These programs provide a safe environment that prevents fatal overdose for high-risk drug-users who would otherwise use in unsafe places. There has not been a single overdose fatality at any OPS program and they are effective at reducing overdose deaths across communities. A study of a Canadian facility found that overdose mortality dropped 35% in the area surrounding the facility after it opened.<sup>2</sup> OPS programs also support the development of a trusting relationship between the OPS staff and individuals who use drugs. OPS program participants are more likely to enter treatment and achieve recovery as a result.<sup>3</sup>

Most recently, New York opened two OPS sites, the first in the United States. The programs operated by OnPoint have reversed over 700 overdoses since opening in November 2021 and have saved approximately \$20 million in hospital and emergency department costs. The neighborhoods surrounding the two sites have experienced no significant changes in violent crimes or property crimes, 911 calls for crime or medical incidents, or 311 calls regarding drug use or unsanitary conditions.<sup>4</sup> These encouraging signs show that OPS programs are feasible and worth considering as a public health and harm reduction intervention.

We must continue to look for innovative ways to engage people who use drugs around safer drug use and connections to treatment. OPS programs can play an important role in overcoming the overdose epidemic and **BHSB urges the Senate Finance Committee to support SB 427.**

***For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142***

## References:

---

<sup>1</sup> Maryland's Overdose Data Dashboard, available at: <https://stopoverdose.maryland.gov/dashboard/>

<sup>2</sup> Brandon DL Marshall et al. "Reduction in overdose mortality after the opening of North America's first medically supervised safer injecting facility: a retrospective population-based study." *The Lancet* 377, no. 9775 (2011): 1429-37.

<sup>3</sup> Levenson TW, et al. "Supervised Injection Facilities as Harm Reduction: A Systematic Review." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2021 Nov;61(5):738-749.

<sup>4</sup> Chalfin A, del Pozo B, Mitre-Becerril D. "Overdose Prevention Centers, Crime, and Disorder in New York City." *JAMA Network Open*. 2023;6(11):e2342228. Available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2811766>