



February 27, 2024

Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Delegate Bonnie Cullison, Vice Chair
Health And Government Operations Committee
House Office Building
Room 241
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Writing in Support of HB1096 Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and House Health And Government Operations Committee Members,

My name is Ruth Carlock from The Brain Injury Association of Maryland, who is the voice of those affected by brain injury through advocacy, education, and research. Traumatic Brain Injuries, including those as a result of overdoses, represent a significant public health concern. Substance use disorders can lead to overdoses that deprive the brain of oxygen resulting in lasting cognitive, physical, and emotional impairments. Research highlights the correlation between substance abuse, overdose incidents, and the risk of acquiring a brain injury.

The Brain Injury Association of America highlights the severe risk of brain injuries during nonfatal opioid overdoses, emphasizing that opioids can depress the central nervous system to the point of reducing or stopping breathing. The association between substance misuse and brain injury is strong, with a notable proportion of individuals in an acute rehabilitation for brain injury being there due to drug or alcohol use. Moreover, individuals with a history of substance misuse are significantly more likely to experience a brain injury, underscoring the intertwined nature of these issues.

Researchers in Canada found that individuals who had experienced a overdose were over 15 times more likely to suffer a brain injury compared to those who had not. This study underscores the importance of OPS in not only reversing overdose events but also in potentially reducing the incidence of subsequent brain injuries among drug users. The findings suggest a critical need for programs and services that offer person-centered, harm reduction-oriented support, highlighting the need for increased awareness, screening, and care for this vulnerable population.

House Bill 1096 addresses a critical component of brain injury prevention for individuals with substance use disorders. These programs not only offer life-saving interventions in the event

of an overdose but also connect individuals with vital resources for recovery and rehabilitation, potentially reducing the long-term impact of brain injuries. We urge the committee render a favorable report and thank you for your consideration of our testimony.