

February 4, 2025

The Honorable Senator Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SUPPORT of Senate Bill 0083 (Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program) - FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Beidle and Senate Finance Committee Members,

My name is Erin Russell, I have been a Maryland resident for over ten years and am a nationally recognized Harm Reduction expert. I am writing to express my utmost support for Senate Bill 0083 “Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program”. As you know, SB0083 will allow community based organizations to establish overdose prevention sites to reduce drug overdose deaths.

Between December 2023 and November 2024, we lost 1,689 Marylanders to fatal overdoses. There is no time to waste in approving and deploying an effective public health response.

Overdose prevention sites (OPS) are one of three interventions that are evidence-based to stop overdose death. The other two are naloxone distribution and buprenorphine access, to which OPS provide direct access. Within an OPS, the self-administration of drugs is monitored. If an overdose occurs, there is immediate intervention. OPS are not just an effective response to an overdose crisis, they are meaningful conduits of the behavioral health system. People are linked to needed health and social services, provided case management and support along the entire continuum of care.

I believe this bill could be amended to limit a pilot program to Baltimore City. There is buy-in, political will, funding, and community demand for OPS in the City. Other counties may be willing to start their own program after a pilot demonstrates effectiveness in the City.

The proposed Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program mirrors the 200 already established across the world in 14 countries, including two in the United States. Maryland would not be the first to pass this bill nor to implement this program in the US. This has been demonstrated to work in urban settings like Baltimore.

I ask that the Senate Finance Committee give SB0083 a favorable report. For more information please contact me at erinhaas88@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Russell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "E" and "R".

Erin Russell, MPH
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Baltimore, MD 21211