

## **Senate Bill No. 83**

### **Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program**

National Coalition for Drug Legalization supports Senate Bill No 83. This act will allow for the state of Maryland to establish an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.

The National Coalition for Drug Legalization (NCDL) is a nonprofit that supports harm reduction but most importantly drug legalization. The mission of the NCDL is to advance the conversation about the legalization of drugs through community service and research. The coalition is composed of national organizations that are working to support drug policy reform to end the devastating impacts of the “War on Drugs” and advance the conversion of drug legalization as an important way forward. The launch of President Nixon’s “War on Drugs” in 1971 triggered an unprecedented investment in the enforcement of drug interdiction and militarization of police departments nationwide. This investment led to massive and disproportionate social and health harms on predominantly poor and working-class Black, Brown, and immigrant communities. To support modern drug policy reform in the context of racialized structural oppression, the coalition seeks to contribute to research to understand the health, social, and criminogenic impacts of drug enforcement and solutions to end drug prohibition.

Drug Prohibition has resulted in many punitive policies against drug users. As a result, we have become a nation that does not adequately fund public health initiatives that will effectively save lives. This country is experiencing a drug overdose crisis because people do not know what is in their drugs. Through innovative initiatives such as an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program, the state of Maryland can earnestly begin to combat its growing drug overdose crisis. Drug users can use this program to get their drugs tested thereby avoiding substances that are laced with adulterants. We believe the establishment of such a program will reduce drug overdoses, keep law enforcement and citizens safer, and provide a clean and safe facility for those suffering from substance use disorders.

Providing an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program will allow for drug treatment. According to Family Advocates Coalition to End Addiction in Maryland (F.A.C.E), more than 40,000 arrests for non-violent drug crimes took place in Maryland in 2014, and 81% of drug arrests were for possession only. Furthermore, Maryland has approximately 4,000 prisoners incarcerated for drug crimes at any point in time, costing the corrections system \$260 million. If we provide more opportunities for drug treatment, less people will be going to jail, and less money will be spent on building penitentiaries. We can build community by providing drug treatment and harm reduction measures that will enable people to be productive members of society.

Again, we support the establishment of an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program. Please contact me for more information.

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Very Respectfully,

**Veronica Wright**  
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