



ON OUR OWN
OF MARYLAND

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 845 Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Thank you Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair Cullison, and committee members for your commitment to improving the quality and accessibility of healthcare services for Marylanders, especially community members who experience significant behavioral health challenges. On Our Own of Maryland (OOOMD) is a nonprofit behavioral health education and advocacy organization, operating for 30+ years by and for people with lived experience of mental health and substance use recovery. We support 16 affiliate peer-operated Wellness & Recovery Organizations throughout the state which serve 7,000+ individuals with complex behavioral health needs each year.

OOOMD is in strong support of HB 845, which would authorize Maryland to implement 6 Overdose Prevention Sites (OPS) to reduce overdose deaths. OPS have been a highly effective life-saving harm reduction strategy across the world and in the US. Not only do they provide a safe, supervised setting where medical professionals can intervene in the case of an overdose, but they also provide connection to treatment, healthcare and social services, medical care including diagnostic testing, and access to harm reduction supplies to prevent infection.

A member of our affiliate peer network shared with us how significant and transformational harm reduction services were for her recovery journey from opiate use. For nearly 10 years, she utilized the Needle Exchange Bus in Baltimore at least once a month where she was able to access clean supplies, trained medical staff, and be connected to behavioral health treatment without judgement or instilling fear:

“To be looked at like a human is amazing. [Harm reduction programs’] only goal is to help you. At some point, someone in my life told me I was worthy and that I deserved to live a better life, and that was when I realized I could.”

Thousands of Marylanders could benefit from OPS being available resources in their communities. Last year, there were 5,800+ EMS naloxone administration encounters, 7,600+ ED visits for overdose, and nearly 1,500 reported opioid-related overdose deaths across the state.¹

¹ The data represents overdose deaths from December 2023 - November 2024. Maryland Department of Health. Overdose Data Portal (2024).
<https://health.maryland.gov/dataoffice/Pages/mdh-dashboards.aspx>



In 2021, New York opened the first government-sanctioned OPS. After a year and a half, there were over 68,000 site visits and staff had reversed nearly 850 overdoses.² Over half of the participants who visited the site also accessed additional care during their visit, including naloxone, counseling, hepatitis C testing, and medical care.³

Substance use and opioid use disorders are still heavily stigmatized, despite evidence that addiction is a medical disease and that over 70% of people with substance use challenges find recovery according to a 2023 SAMHSA report.⁴ This stigma can lead to dire consequences, preventing individuals from seeking the care they need due to shame or fear, and increasing the risk of relapse, overdose deaths and infection. OPS would provide those struggling with substance use with the opportunity to form trusting relationships with clinicians who have expert understanding of the science of addiction, provide competent medical care without stigma or shame, and actively promote the possibility of and pathways to a life in recovery.

We strongly urge the committee to vote in favor of this important bill. Thank you

² Alex Harocopos et al. "First 2 Months of Operation at First Publicly Recognized Overdose Prevention Centers in US." JAMA Network Open 5, no. 7 (2022): e2222149. <https://doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.22149>.

³ Ibid

⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Recovery from Substance Use and Mental Health Problems Among Adults in the United States. Publication No. PEP23-10-00-001. Rockville, MD: Office of Recovery, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023.