

The Honorable Delegate Pena-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 845
(Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program) - FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Health and Government Operations Committee Members,

My name is Molly Greenberg and I am a Baltimore-based nurse at Health Care for the Homeless in support of House Bill 845 “Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program”. HB 845 will allow community-based organizations to establish overdose prevention programs to reduce overdose deaths, which continue to occur at alarming levels in Maryland.

As a nurse in Maryland, I am fortunate to support patients who are not ready or are not able to stop using drugs. We provide drug testing strips and sterile supplies to promote health, and we prescribe medications like Suboxone and Methadone to reduce cravings, treat withdrawal symptoms, and protect against overdose. We offer Naloxone and sharps containers and tend to wounds without judgement. We cannot, however, be with our patients at the moment they are using drugs, and we know that stigma and criminalization often push people into isolation, making them more prone to fatal overdose.

Providing care to people who use drugs without creating a safe space to use, rest, connect, and recover is, from a clinical perspective, inadequate care. Lack of such a space would not be acceptable for patients requiring life-saving interventions like dialysis or chemotherapy. Beyond humanizing people, we know that overdose prevention sites reduce healthcare costs. For years, cost-benefit analyses of safer consumption sites have shown significant cost savings to local governments resulting from reduced disease, overdose deaths, and need for emergency medical services. Furthermore, recent data from OnPoint in NYC shows no increase in community drug use or initiation of drug use, as well as reduced crime and encounters with police in areas where OPS are located.

Between December 2023 and November 2024, we lost 1,689 Marylanders to fatal overdoses. We urge the Maryland General Assembly to authorize overdose and infectious disease prevention services, an intervention proven for over 35 years of research to decrease overdose deaths. The proposed Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program mirrors the 200 evidence-based public health interventions already established across the world in 14 countries, including two in the United States. Trained personnel monitor participants for signs of overdose and intervene to prevent or reverse overdoses. In addition to overdose prevention services, OPCs provide a welcoming space that helps bring drug use indoors and connect people to long-term, life-sustaining resources, like addiction services and social supports, including voluntary treatment.

This is an emergency and I urge you to act now. I ask that the Senate Finance Committee please give HB 845 a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration,

Molly R. Greenberg, MPH, RN , BSN
Harm Reduction Program Manager, Healthcare for the Homeless