

February 24, 2025

The Honorable Chair Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chairman, Health Government and Operations Committee
Room 240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 0845
(Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program) - FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and House HGO Committee Members,

My name is Rajani Gudlavalleti, I am a Baltimore City resident homeowner with almost twenty years experience in harm reduction policy and programming, racial justice advocacy, and organizational capacity building. I am writing in support of House Bill 0845 “Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.” HB0845 will allow community based organizations to establish overdose prevention programs to reduce overdose deaths, which continue to occur at alarming levels in Maryland.

Ten years ago, I served as the initial Director of Overdose Prevention and Response for the Baltimore City Health Department, hired by then-newly appointed Health Commissioner Dr. Leana Wen. Baltimore’s overdose crisis had reached a turning point as our neighbors continued to experience significant pain and hardship, and unregulated fentanyl became more easily accessible. I have since worked to curb the rising overdose epidemic in Maryland from multiple angles - within public policy, public health research, and community organizing. I lost friends, colleagues and mentors to overdose along the way. Witnessed devastating grief. Made passionate appeals to my elected officials for immediate change.

From 2017 through 2024, I had the immense honor of organizing hundreds of Marylanders to better understand and then decide to advocate for overdose prevention sites to operate in our communities. Seeing the sparkle of hope in people’s eyes when we talked about OPS – it was the best experience.

Currently I serve as a policy consultant to national leaders in overdose prevention efforts. Across the U.S., we are bracing for roll-backs on access to established prevention tools such as naloxone and syringe services. This will only result in more death and devastation. Maryland can protect its most vulnerable residents by allowing community-based organizations to bring people inside existing centers, where trained professionals can observe and respond with available resources, referrals, and compassion.

OPS offer the most feasible, immediate opportunity to address this crisis. They are a necessity for the success of Maryland’s continuum of care, with over 35 years of research demonstrating community-level impacts on decreased 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 three in the United States.

This is an emergency. I urge the House HGO Committee to give SB0845 a favorable report.

Sincerely,
Rajani Gudlavalleti
