



February 26, 2025

**House Health and Government Operations Committee  
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT**

*HB 845 - Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program*

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) a nonprofit organization that serves as the local behavioral health authority (LBHA) for Baltimore City. BHSB works to increase access to a full range of quality behavioral health (mental health and substance use) services and advocates for innovative approaches to prevention, early intervention, treatment and recovery for individuals, families, and communities. Baltimore City represents nearly 35 percent of the public behavioral health system in Maryland, serving over 100,000 people with mental illness and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as “behavioral health”) annually.

**Behavioral Health System Baltimore strongly supports HB 845 - Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.** This bill authorizes the Department of Health to approve up to six overdose prevention site (OPS) pilots to support innovative efforts to prevent overdose in Maryland and reduce the harms associated with drug use.

The overdose epidemic has led to the tragic loss of thousands of Marylanders. There are signs that overdose rates have begun to decline in 2024, but Baltimore remains one of the hardest hit parts of the country. Fentanyl is pervasive and far too many people continue to overdose. We must try new interventions and innovations.

OPS programs are a service model that has not been authorized in Maryland but is well established internationally. These programs allow individuals to use pre-obtained drugs under medical supervision. They provide a safe place for people who use drugs to connect with treatment providers and help prevent the isolation that often leads to fatal overdose. Across the globe, these programs have saved thousands of lives and helped to prevent countless other health problems. Program participants are also more likely to enter and remain engaged in treatment. OPS programs achieve all of this without increasing the prevalence of drug use, property crime, or disorderly behavior.<sup>1</sup>

This experience has been born out in New York City where the OnPoint program has operated two OPS programs since 2021. These programs have reversed hundreds of potentially fatal overdoses while also offering wraparounds services and support with other basic needs. The programs have reduced 911 calls and the need for emergency medical services (EMS) in the neighborhoods where they operate. It is estimated that OnPoint has saved \$20 million in hospital and EMS costs.<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island and Minnesota have also recently passed legislation to authorize OPS.

Maryland should join these other states in pursuing every avenue to prevent overdose. **BHSB urges the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support HB 845.**

***For more information, please contact BHSB Policy Director Dan Rabbitt at 443-401-6142***

---

<sup>1</sup> National Institutes of Health. Overdose Prevention Centers: Report to Congress. Available at: <https://nida.nih.gov/sites/default/files/NIH-RTC-Overdose-Prevention-Centers.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> OnPoint NYC. Making History. Saving Lives. Overdose Prevention Centers Baseline Report. 2023. Available at: [https://onpointnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ONPOINTNYC\\_OPCREPORT\\_small-web1.pdf](https://onpointnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ONPOINTNYC_OPCREPORT_small-web1.pdf)