

February 26, 2025

The Honorable Chair Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chairman, Health Government and Operations Committee
Room 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 members of the Health Government and Operations Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Spradley and I am writing to support House Bill 845 “Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program”. HB845 will allow community based organizations to establish overdose prevention programs to reduce overdose deaths, which continue to occur at alarming levels in Maryland.

I am a nurse working in Baltimore City for the past 14 years and, in the past two years, I work at MDH’s Office of Harm Reduction doing statewide work on drug-related wounds. While working across the state with our harm reduction organizations, local health departments, emergency rooms, hospital staff, and home health agencies, people are expressing the dire need for more safe and supportive spaces for people who use drugs.

Overdose prevention sites are just that. Like the harm reduction programs, syringe service programs, substance use consult teams in the ERs, stabilization centers, and some recovery and treatment programs, overdose prevention sites can be an additional space and service offered to people who use drugs with the guarantee that they can be honest about their substance use and current needs. And, it is the offering of a safe space to use drugs in addition to all the other services the overdose prevention site will offer that is the most important piece of this bill. People are overdosing and dying alone in residential spaces where people are often present but don’t know the person is overdosing in another room. How many of those people could be using in a safer manner surrounded by supportive staff ready to keep them alive, offer them care and services to keep them as healthy as possible, educate them on emerging issues, and refer them to other services like treatment, MOUD, housing, healthcare, and social services? It is worth finding out. We know from NYC’s OnPoint overdose prevention sites that these services save lives, it is overdue for us to invest in these services for Marylanders in need.

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 we urge you to act now. We ask that the Health Government and Operations Committee give HB845 a favorable report.

For more information about this position, please contact me at elizabeth.spradley@maryland.gov

Thank you for your time, Elizabeth Spradley