

H.B. 845: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program
Health and Government Operations Committee Hearing
February 26, 2025
Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 845, which would remove the sunset and strengthen Maryland’s balance billing protections to continue to ensure Marylanders can access affordable mental health and substance use disorder care. The Legal Action Center (LAC) is a non-profit law and policy organization that fights discrimination, builds health equity, and restores opportunities for people with substance use disorders, arrest and conviction records, and HIV/AIDS. LAC convenes the Maryland Parity Coalition and works with its partners to ensure non-discriminatory access to mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) services through enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act and advancing other consumer protections and public health policies.

The unmet need for SUD care in Maryland is high and continues to rise. Approximately [80%](#) of adults who were classified as needing SUD treatment in Maryland did not receive treatment in 2022. Maryland has experienced a 300% increase in overdose-related deaths in the last decade, with [over 2,000 overdose-related deaths each year](#) since 2016. Saving lives must be paramount to addressing this crisis, and promising public health strategies to prevent overdose deaths like overdose prevention centers must be supported.

Not every individual who uses drugs has a diagnosed or diagnosable SUD and not all those who have an SUD are ready or willing to seek SUD care. Lack of readiness does not make these individuals any less deserving of critically needed health care and supports. For this population, evidence-based harm reduction services like overdose prevention centers can both mitigate harm and link individuals to SUD treatment when they are ready and willing to participate. Indeed, because these spaces are staffed by health professionals and counselors, and are hygienic, safe, and welcoming places which attend to the multiple needs (including SUD treatment) of individuals whose lives have been nearly destroyed by this disorder, overdose prevention centers offer an invaluable opportunity for us to help fellow Marylanders take the first step into recovery. Evidence from over 20 years of overdose prevention centers in other countries shows that no one has died from an overdose while at an overdose prevention site, and that these facilities are associated with reduced drug use, lower demand on local healthcare and emergency response services, no increase in crime, and increased access to SUD treatment.¹

Thank you for considering our testimony, and we urge a favorable report on H.B. 845.

Sincerely,

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¹ “Overdose Prevention Centers,” National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse (August 2023), <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/overdose-prevention-centers>.

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