



MDDCSAM is the Maryland state chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine whose members are physicians and other health providers who treat people with substance use disorders.

HB 1066

Commission on Behavioral Health Care Treatment and Access - Membership and Workgroups
Hearing March 5, 2025, Health & Government Operations Committee

FAVORABLE

Greetings Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice-Chair Cullison, and members of the committee,

(NOTE THAT MEDCHI ALSO SUPPORTS THIS BILL)

The new workgroup called for in this bill promises to **finally inform the overarching dichotomy** in our **approach to substance use disorder (SUD)**. For decades, well-intentioned advocates have argued for or against **a criminal legal approach to addictions on the one hand, vs. a person-centered, decriminalization, harm-reduction, treatment & recovery approach on the other.**

We are confident that the evidence supports the latter. Yet, apparently, doubt remains on the part of legislators and the public.

We have all heard **the anecdotes of individuals who finally overcame addiction while incarcerated. We're sure this occurs, but it is the exception to the rule.** Anecdotes are not evidence.

It seems obvious to our side that **the immense harms of incarceration make it vastly harder to attain recovery** – for individuals, families and communities. We know from years of helping others that **employment, education, housing and financial stability are keys to recovery**, even when reaching these steps sometimes take years. We know this because it is how we, as experts, help individuals move toward recovery. **Each of these building blocks become difficult or impossible to reach after incarceration, often blocking the path to recovery like a brick wall.**

The new workgroup would examine treatment outcomes for individuals referred for SUD through the criminal justice system compared to those who seek treatment voluntarily. To the extent that there is still uncertainty in this age-old debate, which continues to block progress, we need to collectively study this overarching question – once and for all – and achieve clarity so we can finally accelerate progress.

Respectfully,

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