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HB1502

March 13, 2025

TO: Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Nina Themelis, Director of the Mayor's Office of Government Relations

RE: House Bill 1502 – Baltimore City - AIDS Prevention Sterile Needle and Syringe Exchange Pilot Program - Revisions

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Peña-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Committee, please be advised that the Baltimore City Administration (BCA) **supports** House Bill (HB) 1502.

Baltimore City made Maryland history by being the first jurisdiction in the state to open a syringe services program (SSP) after the Program was established in state statute in 1994. SSPs provide clients with sterile syringes, collect used syringes, and provide a wide array of health care services and referrals to other providers. While it was pioneering at the time – and the program has subsequently had great public health success – the statute needs to be revisited and updated. HB 1502 will modernize the statute to reflect current public health best practices and local government needs. Specifically, the bill does the following:

The statute established an oversight committee for the program and requires state agencies to nominate several members. This bill adjusts the composition of the committee and transitions the authority to nominate members to the community that it serves: Baltimore City. As the program has been operating successfully for over 30 years, the City should have full authority to determine who is appropriate to serve on its oversight committee.

The program was created as a pilot and is still referred to as such in the legislation. The bill strikes the word “pilot” from the statute.

Last but certainly not least, the statute unintentionally stigmatizes people living with HIV and people who use drugs through now-outdated, inaccurate language. This bill modernizes the language of the statute to reflect our modern understanding of these public health issues. For example, the bill updates the words “needles” to “syringes” and “AIDS” to “HIV.” As we are sure members of our Delegation can appreciate, it is important for our laws to progress with us. Awareness about the effects of stigmatizing and inaccurate language has grown, and strategies for revising this language have been established. As consensus around destigmatizing language develops, legislation should be revisited periodically to ensure that the language aligns.

This bill will bring an important law in-line with modern scientific and cultural understanding of HIV and substance use. Revising this legislation will help ensure the comfort and empowerment of people living with and affected by HIV, as well as reflect the effectiveness of HIV prevention and treatment and harm reduction programs. This bill is a step towards the goal of combatting stigma, strengthening strategies to prevent HIV transmission, and creating environments conducive to culturally appropriate HIV services for Baltimore City.

For the above reason, the BCA respectfully requests a **favorable** report on HB 1502.

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