



March 13, 2025

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

HB 1502 – Baltimore City - AIDS Prevention Sterile Needle and Syringe Exchange Pilot Program - Revisions

Behavioral Health System Baltimore (BHSB) is 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 supports HB1502 – Baltimore City - AIDS Prevention Sterile Needle and Syringe Exchange Pilot Program - Revisions. This local bill aims to update the statute for Baltimore City’s syringe service program (SSP) at the request of the Baltimore City Mayor’s Office. These reasonable updates will help combat stigma and improve oversight of the SSP program.

Baltimore City was the first jurisdiction in Maryland to establish a SSP. The program was created through state statute in 1994 and has been operating ostensibly as a pilot program ever since. SSPs are well established throughout the state at this point and only Baltimore City’s program is operating under the 1994 statute. This warrants an update to the City’s authorizing statute.

HB1502 would achieve several modest aims. The bill would eliminate references to the program as a ‘pilot program’, provide the City with full authority to nominate members of the SSP oversight committee, and change some outdated language. This would bring the Baltimore SSP in line with the other programs authorized statewide while also addressing some unintentionally stigmatizing language.

This bill would make minor and technical adjustments to Baltimore’s pioneering SSP law at the request of Baltimore’s elected leadership. **We urge the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support HB1502.**

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