



House Bill 728

Opioid Restitution Fund - Authorized Uses

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: February 12, 2025

From: Sarah Sample and Karrington Anderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** HB 728. This bill would create an avenue for money designated for victims and mitigation efforts through the Opioid Restitution Fund to be redirected to the Office of the Attorney General for attorneys' fees and operating expenses.

Redirecting funds from the opioid recovery effort will undermine life-saving work. The emotional, physical, and financial damage inflicted on communities across Maryland by the opioid crisis is almost incalculable. The remediation efforts, while extensive, may never allow families and individuals to recover what they've lost. The provisions of this bill take funding directly from the victim remediation efforts to cover costs that are the rightful responsibility of the State. In doing so, it serves to compromise the work that thousands of public health officials and local governments are doing statewide.

The Governor and General Assembly are responsible for ensuring State agencies are funded effectively to serve residents. The Office of the Attorney General has been charged with protecting the State and its residents from bad actors since the 1900s. Specific to the opioid crisis, and in the Attorney General's own words, "The opioid epidemic has claimed thousands of innocent lives through addiction and overdoses, has torn families apart, and has devastated communities across this country. This settlement money will help support recovery efforts in Maryland and prevent future loss where we need it most." HB 728 would allow the State to use the restitution funds toward the basic functions of state government, rather than going toward their intended purpose of directly benefiting victims.

Opioid remediation efforts require substantial funding at a time when the State is struggling to cover the costs of existing ambitions and commitments. Local detention centers are already suffering consequences of the State's shortcoming. Local facilities have been covering millions of dollars in opioid-related costs that are the rightful responsibility of the State for years, with no meaningful remuneration. Legislation to finally remedy this unfair circumstance and properly harness the State's opioid funds to do so is being considered this session. **However, the consequences of HB 728 would only extend that injustice onto victims by removing some of their dedicated funding.**

Accordingly, MACo urges the Committee to give HB 728 an **UNFAVORABLE** report and preserve its commitment to opioid mitigation efforts as originally established through these targeted funds.