

March 13, 2025

**Senate Bill 140 | House Bill 690 - Overdose Awareness Day**

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

House Health & Government Operations Committee

**POSITION: Support**

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Michael Barnes, and as a lifelong Maryland resident, I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 140 | House Bill 690, which would require the Governor to annually proclaim August 31 as Overdose Awareness Day.

For me, and so many others across our state, this bill is deeply personal. The impact of addiction and overdose is something I have witnessed firsthand - Losing someone to an overdose has left a vacancy in my life. The friends I've lost to overdose leave me with memories of their spirit. They were a joy to be around and always lit up the room when they walked in. I am in support of Overdose Awareness Day because the community needs to continue education on harm reduction. The harmful sides of addiction should be exposed just as much as the grandiose side; the homelessness, the diseases, the loss of income, the loss of jobs, the loss of life, the loss of self-esteem. When you're living with addiction, every aspect of your life and day becomes dedicated to your substance of choice. If people were shown the harsh realities of addiction, perhaps society would be more empathetic. Overdose Awareness Day is not just a symbolic gesture; it is a powerful acknowledgment of the struggles so many face, a way to break the stigma surrounding substance use disorder, and a reminder that recovery is possible.

In 2024, Maryland saw a 38% reduction in fatal overdoses, dropping from 2,511 deaths in 2023 to 1,553 deaths. This progress reflects the incredible work happening across our state—from expanded harm reduction programs to comprehensive treatment options. Here in Anne Arundel County, initiatives like the Overdose Response Training program equip community members with life-saving skills, including the administration of naloxone, which can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. Programs like these meet people where they are, providing critical resources that help prevent unnecessary deaths.

But we must do more. By officially recognizing Overdose Awareness Day, we have the opportunity to honor those we've lost, support those in recovery, and continue the fight against addiction with compassion and education. Those who have struggled and survived should know that their journeys matter. Families mourning loved ones should have a day to remember, to grieve, and to advocate for change.

Passing Senate Bill 140 | House Bill 690 would send a clear message that Maryland is committed to saving lives, promoting recovery, and ensuring that no one suffering from substance use disorder is forgotten. I urge you to support this bill and help us continue to build a community of healing, awareness, and action.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael Barnes

Anne Arundel County Resident