

February 26, 2025



House Health and Government Operations Committee
House Bill 845 - Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services
Program
FAVORABLE

Charm City Care Connection supports House Bill 845 (Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program). HB845 will authorize the establishment of Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services (OPS) to help reduce overdose deaths in Maryland.

Founded in 2009, Charm City Care Connection (CCCC) is a community-based harm reduction drop-in center in East Baltimore. As a state authorized Syringe Service Program (SSP) and Overdose Response Program (ORP), we are on the front line of defense in providing support against overdose for the people most at risk in Baltimore City. We connect with people in the community who normally cannot access life-saving services in a traditional manner through regular outreach, with a primary focus on serving individuals who use drugs. We build ongoing relationships with our clients in a way that allows us to provide supportive counseling, referrals, and linkage to care. Our mission is to serve as a pathway to healthcare, low-barrier drug treatment, and other wrap-around services while upholding the dignity, respect, and agency of our clients.

As an authorized SSP, we are legally allowed to distribute sterile drug use supplies to our clients. However, our ability to help our participants reduce their risk of overdose ends after they have received their supplies and education from us and walk out the door. We can provide them naloxone, but we cannot guarantee that when they next use drugs someone will be around to administer it should they experience an overdose. OPS programs are an intervention that seeks to change that by allowing service providers to give people a safe place to use drugs under the supervision of staff who are trained to recognize and respond to an overdose.

Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Programs are linked to the following outcomes:

- Reductions in overdose fatalities;
- Increases in substance use treatment uptake;
- Reductions in hospital stays, emergency department visits, and EMS calls;
- Reductions in public drug use and syringe litter; and
- Reductions in the risk of physical and sexual violence for people who use drugs.

OPS programs do not cause an increase in crime or encourage drug use. People who use OPSs are likely to reduce injection frequency, stop injecting, and remain in drug treatment compared to those who never use these programs.

OPS are a critical element missing from Maryland's strategy to reduce overdose deaths. **For these reasons and more, we ask that the House Health and Government Operations Committee give HB845 a favorable report.**

For more information about Charm City Care Connection or this position, please contact Owen O'Keefe at ookeefe@charmcityclinic.org.