



March 5, 2025

## House Health and Government Operations Committee

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

#### *HB 1131 - Public Health - Buprenorphine - Training Grant Program and Workgroup*

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 strongly supports HB1131 - Public Health - Buprenorphine - Training Grant Program and Workgroup.** This would create a new grant program to support the training of paramedics in administering buprenorphine and establish a time-limited workgroup to study access to buprenorphine in the State.

Buprenorphine is a partial agonist medication used in the treatment of opioid use disorder (OUD). Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) have the best treatment outcomes of any approach to OUD. They reduce cravings, increase treatment retention, and reduce the likelihood of relapse and overdose.<sup>1</sup> Buprenorphine also has far fewer regulatory limitations than the full agonist medication methadone. This combination of effectiveness and access makes buprenorphine one of our best tools to treat OUD, but utilization remains limited. Indeed, Maryland has even seen a decline in MOUD use over the last few years.<sup>2</sup> It is critical that the state increase access to buprenorphine to help more individuals struggling with OUD to avoid overdose and achieve recovery.

HB1131 represents a creative approach to improve buprenorphine access in Maryland. This bill would first create a grant program to train paramedics in administering buprenorphine. Administering buprenorphine on the scene of a medical emergency such as an overdose is a new and innovative approach to engaging hard to serve individuals with OUD. The premise of this intervention is to provide immediate relief from cravings through administering buprenorphine and then proactively engage with the individual on the scene to encourage them to participate in ongoing treatment. The initial results of some demonstration programs around the country look promising.<sup>3</sup> The grant would be funded through the opioid restitution fund (ORF) and would not impact state general funds.

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). How Effective Are Medications to Treat Opioid Use Disorder? June 1, 2018. Available at <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/medications-to-treat-opioid-addiction/efficacy-medications-opioid-use-disorder>.

<sup>2</sup> MDH. Data-Informed Overdose Risk Mitigation (DORM): 2023 Annual Report. Available at <https://stopoverdose.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/34/2024/10/2023-DORM-Report.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Hern HG, Lara V, Goldstein D, Kalmin M, Kidane S, Shoptaw S, Tzvieli O, Herring AA. Prehospital Buprenorphine Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder by Paramedics: First Year Results of the EMS Buprenorphine Use Pilot. *Prehospital Emergency Care*. 2023;27(3):334-342. Available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35420925/>.

The second part of the bill would create a work group within the Maryland Office of Overdose Response to look at buprenorphine access broadly across the state and offer recommendations. This issue warrants a close review considering the challenges the state faces in increasing access to buprenorphine due to stigma, concerns from pharmacies, the changing federal landscape and more. We applaud the sponsors for proposing such a work group.

Maryland needs creative solutions to increase access to buprenorphine. **We urge the House Health and Government Operations Committee to support HB1131 and help the state progress in its efforts to combat the opioid epidemic.**

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