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**House Bill 379: Prince George's County - Public Middle and High Schools - Drug Detection
Products PG 507-25
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT
February 5, 2025
House Ways and Means Committee**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 379 with an amendment. My name is Sivabalaji Kaliyamurthy, MD, and I am an addiction and child and adolescent psychiatrist at Children's National Hospital. Children's National has been serving the nation's children since 1870. Nearly 60% of our patients are residents of Maryland, and we maintain a network of community-based pediatric practices, surgery centers and regional outpatient centers in Maryland. Additionally, I worked to establish the addictions program at Children's National, a specialized outpatient clinic providing tailored support to children grappling with co-occurring psychiatric and substance use disorders.

To be clear, first and foremost, preventing drug use in children and adolescents is our key priority. In collaboration with our partners in the field, including educators, school administrators, youth, and others, it has become evident that many youths are already using alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, and other drugs. To address this reality, we must expand our resources and supports to meet a broad spectrum of needs—from primary prevention education to targeted interventions and cessation supports.

While encouraging youth to abstain from drug use is critical, we must also implement harm-reduction strategies and messaging for those who are already experimenting or using substances. This includes providing high school students with scientifically accurate information and tools to empower them to quit and/or reduce harm should they choose to continue using.

Opioid overdose deaths and opioid use disorder are significant problems among youth in Prince George's County.¹ Addressing this issue requires targeted strategies and robust resources to mitigate its devastating effects on our community.

House Bill 379 takes meaningful steps by requiring the Prince George's County Board of Education to provide drink spiking detection products and drug detection strip products, such as those for fentanyl, at no charge to students. Some of my patients, particularly those with the means, are already purchasing drug detection products online to test substances they acquire. By making these tools available in school-based health clinics, libraries, and bathrooms, this bill ensures students have easy access to potentially life-saving resources. However, it is crucial to emphasize that access to these products alone is not enough. **I recommend that comprehensive education on substance use prevention, along with specific guidance on how to use these products, be included as an amendment.**

We know from nasal naloxone distribution efforts that, for youth, it is the combination of access to naloxone and education on how to identify opioid overdoses and administer naloxone that has a measurable impact in preventing overdose deaths. Similarly, providing drug detection products must be accompanied by education to ensure these tools are used effectively.

Additionally, the requirement for schools to register with the Overdose Response Program within the Department of Health will strengthen coordinated efforts to address substance use among youth. While there is limited evidence on the impact of drug detection products for youth under 18, studies among young adults show that access to these tools, coupled with education, significantly influences behavior around substance use, often leading to reduced harm and increased engagement in treatment.²³ The lack of evidence for younger populations should not deter implementation, as we are in an unprecedented time when children are exposed to and using substances like fentanyl at alarming rates.

While I fully support this legislation, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of implementing drug testing products en masse at the middle school level. A primary concern is the potential for increased anxiety within the community, which could undermine the intended benefits of such measures. Careful planning and communication with stakeholders are essential

¹ For example, almost 90% of the adolescents referenced in this brief report were from Prince George's County: [Brief Report on Outpatient Treatment of Adolescent Opioid Use Disorder - PubMed](#)

² Krieger, M.S., Yedinak, J.L., Buxton, J.A. et al. High willingness to use rapid fentanyl test strips among young adults who use drugs. *Harm Reduct J* 15, 7 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-018-0213-2>

³ Goldman, J.E., Waye, K.M., Periera, K.A. et al. Perspectives on rapid fentanyl test strips as a harm reduction practice among young adults who use drugs: a qualitative study. *Harm Reduct J* 16, 3 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-018-0276-0>

to ensure these programs are introduced thoughtfully and effectively, minimizing unintended consequences. I urge the Committee to consider the following points:

1. Prevention of drug use should remain the top priority, supported by a comprehensive range of resources, from education to cessation programs.
2. Harm-reduction strategies and scientifically accurate messaging are essential to empower youth to make informed decisions and reduce potential harm.
3. The opioid crisis among youth, particularly in Prince George's County, demands immediate attention and action.
4. Implementation of drug detection products in high schools, alongside a cautious and deliberate approach for middle schools, will address current needs while mitigating community concerns.

I applaud the Prince George's County Delegation for introducing this novel legislation, which will have life-long benefits for our state's youngest residents and their families and respectfully request a favorable report with amendment on House Bill 379. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

For more information, please contact:

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