

March 2, 2026

The Honorable Guy Suzzone
Chair, Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401



**RE: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS for Senate Bill 284
*Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026***

Dear Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Budget & Taxation Committee Members,

The Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) submits this testimony in support of **Senate Bill 284 - Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2026** with amendments. Specifically, we urge the General Assembly to restore the proposed \$20 million reduction to school behavioral health programs and maintain the full \$100 million annual appropriation.

BHRC is an overdose response program and a Maryland Department of Health-authorized syringe service program. We conduct daily street outreach in partnership with local churches and engage more than 300 Marylanders each week. We provide overdose prevention education, distribute naloxone and other life-saving supplies, and connect people to stabilizing care including mental health and substance use services.

While Maryland has seen recent decreases in overdose deaths, these reductions are fragile and the state remains in an overdose crisis.¹ Young people continue to be impacted by overdoses related to their own substance use, and that of their classmates, guardians, and family members. As young people are navigating trauma, grief, and their own development, schools are often the only consistent place where they can access behavioral health support.

Reducing these funds by \$20 million weakens Maryland's prevention capacity at a time of federal funding instability. H.R. 1, known as the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act", included nearly \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid - the largest payer of behavioral health services for youth and adults.² In January 2026, almost \$2 billion in mental health and addiction-related grants were cut by SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) to over 2,000 organizations before being reinstated.³ These funding reductions and ongoing uncertainty threaten to destabilize the behavioral health landscape in Maryland and nationally. In this context, state-level reductions in funding exacerbates risk.

Reducing school behavioral health funding does not reduce need. Costs shift to emergency departments, crisis response systems, child welfare agencies, and the criminal legal system. Restoring the \$20 million maintains Maryland's \$100 million annual investment in student behavioral health to strengthen prevention, support families, and mitigate long-term financial and human costs. We respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 284 with amendments to restore full funding for school behavioral health services.

For more information about this position, please contact Darci Curwen-Garber, BHRC Policy Manager, at darci@baltimoreharmreduction.org.

Sincerely,

The Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC)