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**HB 423: Prince George's County - Public High Schools - Drug Detection Products PG 501-26
Position: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT
February 11, 2026
House Ways and Means Committee**

Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of House Bill 423 with an amendment. My name is Aishwarya Thakur, and I am an Attending Physician in Pediatrics, Adolescent Medicine, and Addiction Medicine at Children's National Hospital. As the region's only standalone children's hospital, Children's National has been serving the nation's children since 1870. For 155 years, we have delivered expert pediatric care at every milestone. Sixty percent of our patients are residents of Maryland, and we maintain a large network of community-based pediatric practices, surgery centers and regional outpatient centers in Maryland.

Most overdose deaths among adolescents are unintentional. Since 2019, 85% of overdose deaths have been associated with fentanyl. Fentanyl is dangerous because even a one-time use can lead to overdose, and therefore death. While overdose deaths among adolescents have been decreasing since 2021, they remain nearly 124 times higher than rates in 1999.¹ Much of the decrease in overdose deaths in recent years has been attributed to the availability of naloxone – which is an opioid overdose reversal agent. Greater public health awareness has also contributed to this decline. Whether a person is using a drug for the first time, or the hundredth, it is our collective responsibility to give them the tools and knowledge to keep them safe.

House Bill 423 takes an important step in increasing public health awareness of the risks of substance use at the school-level, while also ensuring adolescents have the tools to make safer choices. While drug-detection products are made available for free by the Department of Health, ensuring that they are at schools will increase accessibility for adolescents, who either may not know that these products are available to them, or how to obtain them. They may also

¹ Chen Y, Seifers H, Wang Z, Bell LA. Trends in U.S. Adolescent and Young Adult Overdose Fatalities, 1999-2023. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2025;77(5):997-1000. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2025.06.023

not feel comfortable getting these products sent to their homes. When asked those who use drugs about fentanyl test strips, they said, "If I had them, I would use them every time."²

While we don't have data regarding the use of fentanyl test strips in an adolescent population, we know from data on other harm reduction measures, such as providing condoms to protect against sexually transmitted infections (STI), that the availability of condoms does not lead to increased rates of sex, and in fact leads to a decrease in STI rates. Therefore, the expected effect of educating adolescents on the risks of substance use and providing them with harm reduction measures should be reduced overdose rates.

I support House Bill 423, but I propose an amendment to include education on how to use the drug detection measures. This can be in the form of verbal, written, or pictorial instructions. However, it is important to relay how to use the test, to test various parts of the substance as fentanyl may be concentrated in different parts of the supply, and how to read the test result. Fentanyl test strips are read similarly to a urine pregnancy test with different meanings if there is one versus two lines that show up. We would be remiss if we did not educate users on how to read the results accurately.³

As an addiction medicine physician, I regularly work with adolescents who understand the risks of substance use and are actively trying to reduce or stop their use. Substance use disorders are chronic medical conditions, and it often takes multiple attempts before a young person is able to achieve remission. Drug-detection tools can play a critical role in keeping adolescents safe during this process by reducing the risk of exposure to unexpected and dangerous substances. I have also cared for adolescents who have nearly overdosed—or know someone who has—because fentanyl or another unexpected drug was present in their supply of a completely unrelated substance. Providing access to drug detection tests can help prevent these tragedies and protect adolescents in this current environment.

I applaud Delegate Taveras and the Prince George's County Delegation for introducing this important 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 423. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

For more information, please contact:

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² Reed MK, Salcedo VJ, Guth A, Rising KL. "If I had them, I would use them every time": Perspectives on fentanyl test strip use from people who use drugs. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*. 2022;140:108790. doi:10.1016/j.jsat.2022.108790

³ Reed MK, Esteves Camacho T, Rising KL, Laurano R, Albaciete D, Lankenau SE. Urgent Need for Pairing Training and Education With Fentanyl Test Strip Distribution. *Drug and Alcohol Review*. 2025;44(7):1885-1895. doi:10.1111/dar.70049