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SHERIFF

HARFORD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

House Bill 1378 - Support

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Criminal Law- Opioids- Distribution Causing Death of Minor

Letter of Support to the House Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 6, 2020

Heroin Overdoses in Harford County

- 2015 - 174 non-fatal and 28 fatal = 202 (24 Narcan Saves)
- 2016 – 234 non-fatal and 56 fatal = 290 (68 Narcan Saves)
- 2017 – 369 non-fatal and 81 fatal = 450 (134 Narcan Saves)
- 2018 - 484 non-fatal and 83 fatal = 567 (116 Narcan Saves)
- 2019 - 379 non-fatal and 50 fatal= 429 (70 Narcan Saves)

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee, as the Sheriff of Harford County I am pleased to offer my full support of House Bill 1378, *Distribution of Heroin or Fentanyl Causing the Death of a Minor*.

Over the course of the last five years, I have personally seen the devastating effects of heroin on all segments of our community. As you can see from the 2019 numbers that hard work and team approach in Harford County is paying off as we are seeing a significant decline in our fatal overdoses. While these results are encouraging; deaths from opioids continue to plague our families and communities; no neighborhood has been spared from the deadly effects of this highly addictive drug.

Working with our community partners, we have made some major changes in how we deal with this deadly epidemic. One of my first actions as Sheriff was to form the HOPE (Heroin Overdose Prevention Effort) for Harford work group. Our group has worked diligently to develop Legislative, Policy, Prevention and Educational initiatives to fight back against the scourge on our community.

All 300+ of our law enforcement deputies have been trained and are equipped with the drug Narcan and have successfully administered the drug well over 400 times to save lives in the last five years. We have hosted town hall meetings and participated in middle school forums with parents, teachers and students to educate them on the real dangers of this drug. We launched our mobile HOPE House, a trailer that offers adults the ability to learn about signs of substance abuse/use by touring a young person's bedroom setting. We partnered with the Office of Drug Control Policy to begin the PLEDGE Program, designed to inform and educate elementary school children about the dangers of illegal drugs. We have initiated a Substance Abuse Unit on our detention center, which recently achieved full accreditation and licensure as a treatment program. We have added heroin overdose awareness signs at five locations in Harford County, informing residents of the number of neighbors that have lost their lives because of this drug and allowing the community to understand the full impact of the problem. We have done much outside of traditional law enforcement to combat the plague of this epidemic, however, we must now put more focus of those dealers responsible for so much death and heartache in our communities.

As Sheriff, I have changed policy on how our deputies respond to potential overdose victims. When a medical overdose call goes out, a criminal investigator now responds to most call and obtains information and intelligence for law enforcement to investigate and go after those that are responsible for supplying this drug and killing far too many Marylanders. These dealers need to be removed from our streets and from the ability to continue to take so many lives.

I am writing today to ask you to pass this legislation to provide law enforcement with the tools necessary to arrest and keep these dealers off our streets and out of our neighborhoods. This drug is deadly and those who distribute it to minors should be held accountable when the drug they sell takes the life of a child.

Please give the legislation your consideration and support the creation of a possible sentence of 30 years imprisonment for those individuals who would deal in dangerous drugs and cause the death of a minor. These suppliers, who willfully and knowingly distribute this deadly drug, need to be incarcerated for their part in causing so many to lose their lives, destroying families and causing irreversible damage to society.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Jeffrey R. Gahler