

**House Bill 396 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease
Prevention Services Program**

Health and Government Operations Committee

March 11, 2021

Position: SUPPORT

The Mental Health Association of Maryland is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health, mental illness and substance use. We appreciate this opportunity to present this **testimony in support of House Bill 396.**

HB 396 will allow community-based organizations in Maryland to establish overdose and infectious disease prevention programs. Overdose prevention sites are facilities where people can use previously purchased drugs under trained supervision. Providing sterile needles, health care services, and referrals to drug treatment, these sites aim to reduce the harms associated with drug use. The bill limits the number of programs to six across the state.

The public health and safety threat from drug and alcohol related intoxication continues to grow. **Americans are now more likely to die from opioid overdoses than car crashes¹.** Maryland has made progress in recent years to address this epidemic, but we are still in the midst of a crisis that is devastating families across the state. Over 2,100 Marylanders lost their lives to an opioid-related death in 2019.²

The coronavirus pandemic has made matters even worse. In a survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 13% of respondents said they have started or increased their substance use to cope with stress from the pandemic.³ Maryland drug- and alcohol-related deaths jumped by more than 18% in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the same period a year earlier, including a 30% increase in opioid-related deaths.

This is a **public health crisis** that cries out for new solutions. The program proposed in HB 396 is modeled after programs already operating in more than 60 cities in 12 countries around the world. Numerous studies show the positive impact of this particular intervention, with evidence showing that overdose prevention facilities reduce opioid- and overdose-related deaths, reduce public drug use, serve as an access point to behavioral health care and other social services, and reduce hospital admissions and associated costs.

Overdose prevention sites are **critical components** in the battle to reduce overdose deaths in our state. For this reason, MHAMD strongly supports HB 396 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://www.nsc.org/in-the-newsroom/for-the-first-time-were-more-likely-to-die-from-accidental-opioid-overdose-than-motor-vehicle-crash>

² Maryland Opioid Operational Command Center 2019 Annual Report.
https://health.maryland.gov/vsa/Documents/Overdose/REV_Annual_2019_Drug_Intox_Report.pdf

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

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