



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy

Vision: Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

HB369 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program

Hearing Date: 3/11/21

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chairwoman Pendergrass, Vice-Chairwoman Pena-Melnyk and members of the committee: We'd like to thank Delegate Pena-Melnyk for introducing important public health legislation to establish a thoughtful program for overdose and infectious disease prevention in Maryland. We submit this testimony on behalf of the Maryland Public Health Association to express our SUPPORT for HB369: Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the health and mental issues so many Marylanders struggling with addiction already face. As a result, the past year has seen a substantial increase in the number of drug overdose-related deaths: approximately 14.5% higher in just one year according to Maryland's Opioid Operations Command Center and the Department of Health (Baltimore Sun report). Drug use, especially with injections, also leads to more cases of HIV infection and Hepatitis C. Though the General Assembly has taken valuable steps to address this epidemic, MdPHA agrees that more must be done to curb substance addiction, death, and the spread of related infectious disease.

Supervised facilities, like Overdose Prevention Sites (OPSs), where people with drug addiction can have immediate access to life saving mental health and medical care, while managing their addiction in a safe and legal setting, has proven to save lives. This is a critical way to give people non-judgmental therapeutic care and help them quit in a realistic way. This type of program has the potential to reduce the number of deaths from overdose significantly, reduce the spread of HIV and HepC, increase community safety, prevent unnecessary hospital and emergency room costs, and offer more people access to drug treatment and rehabilitation services. Canada, the Netherlands, Switzerland (for example) have all found positive results from similar programs, as have cities like Philadelphia. One study found a 35% decrease in overdose deaths in the area around an OPS facility within one year of opening. Solutions like those outlined in HB369 are worth supporting. Thank you.

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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