



## **Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association**

To the Health and Government Operations Committee

March 11, 2021

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

### **POSITION: SUPPORT**

Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of House Bill 396 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program.

MRHA and its members support this legislation that establishes an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program by a community-based organization to provide a place for the consumption of pre-obtained drugs, provide sterile needles, administer first aid, and other services in at least two rural areas.

This initiative in harm reduction by community-based organizations is a necessary step in addressing and providing local, community solutions to combat substance abuse disorders. Rural Marylanders are at an increased risk for substance abuse disorder due to unique social determinants of health that create barriers to equitable and quality behavioral health services.

MRHA’s mission is to educate and advocate for the optimal health and wellness of rural communities and their residents. Membership is comprised of health departments, hospitals, community health centers, health professionals, and community members in rural Maryland.

Maryland law states that “many rural communities in the State face a host of difficult challenges relating to persistent unemployment, poverty, changing technological and economic conditions, an aging population and an out-migration of youth, inadequate access to quality housing, health care and other services, and deteriorating or inadequate transportation, communications, sanitations, and economic development infrastructure.” (West’s Annotated Code of Maryland, State Finance and Procurement § 2-207.8b).

And while Maryland is one of the richest states, there is great disparity in how wealth is distributed. The greatest portion of wealth resides around the Baltimore/Washington Region; while further away from the I-95 corridor, differences in the social and economic environment are very apparent.

MHRA believes this legislation is important to support our rural communities and we thank you for your consideration.

*Lara Wilson, Executive Director, [larawilson@mdruralhealth.org](mailto:larawilson@mdruralhealth.org), 410-693-6988*