



## **Testimony in Favor of House Bill 396 - Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program**

**TO:** Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

**FROM:** Thomas Higdon, on behalf of The People's Commission to Decriminalize Maryland

My name is Thomas Higdon, I live in Reisterstown in the 10th district and I am the co-chair of the Drug Policy work group for The People's Commission to Decriminalize Maryland. I submit this testimony on behalf of The People's Commission To Decriminalize Maryland, and in favor of House Bill 396.

As a member of The People's Commission and a person in recovery I've seen firsthand the devastating consequences of drug overdose – lives lost, families destroyed, and communities devastated. And this problem has only gotten worse in the last year with the arrival of COVID-19 in our state. More than 2000 fellow Marylanders – coworkers, neighbors, friends, parents, and children – died of drug overdoses in just the first half of 2020. That represents a 12.1% increase over the same period in 2019.

In response to this crisis, there has been growing interest in seeking new solutions to the overdose problem; solutions rooted in public health rather than incarceration. This new approach has led to a continuum of services that includes methadone/Suboxone maintenance, Syringe Service Programs (SSP), and naloxone distribution. Safe consumption sites represent a natural evolution of this public health approach to overdose prevention.

A review of 75 published studies concluded that safe injection sites reduce overdoses and do not lead to increases in drug use or related crime.<sup>1</sup> In fact, research indicates that people who use safe injection sites are *more* likely to enter detox and initiate treatment.<sup>2</sup>

It is time for us to stop criminalizing people who struggle with drugs. Instead, we must recognize that drug use is a public health issue that requires public health solutions. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 396.

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<sup>1</sup> Chloé Potier, Vincent Laprèvote, Françoise Dubois-Arber, Olivier Cottencin, Benjamin Rolland, Supervised injection services: What has been demonstrated? A systematic literature review, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, Volume 145, 2014, Pages 48-68, ISSN 0376-8716, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2014.10.012>.

<sup>2</sup> Wood, E., Tyndall, M.W., Zhang, R., Montaner, J.S.G. and Kerr, T. (2007), Rate of detoxification service use and its impact among a cohort of supervised injecting facility users. *Addiction*, 102: 916-919. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2007.01818.x>