



**Burrell International Group, LLC**  
Strategic Government Marketing Services

February 13, 2024

The Honorable Joseline Mena-Pelnyk  
Chairwoman  
House Government Operations Committee  
Maryland House of Delegates  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Madame Chairwoman and Committee Members:

My name is Debbie Burrell and I am here in support of House Bill 736 which continues coverage of overdose reversal drugs that are now available over the counter and caps the price at \$10. I have been involved in this issue for many years both professionally and personally, and testified in 2017 and 2019 on the opioid overdose issue. Professionally, as a consultant, and former Chief of Staff to Congressman Bartlett, I have spent over 18 years working in Maryland's 6<sup>th</sup> District with individuals and families who have been affected by addiction and the rise of opioid overdoses in Western Maryland. As the Maryland Board Member and Healthcare Chair for Strengthening the Mid-Atlantic Region for Tomorrow, our working group has identified opioid overdose and prevention as a key focus area in the region and work towards consistent policies across state lines. Personally, I have buried one of my closest friends from abuse of prescription opioids, and attended the funeral of another friend's son his senior year of high school who overdosed on prescription opioids.

In 2021 1,358 people died from an opioid overdose in Maryland. With the ongoing nationwide crisis, access to the overdose reversal drug, naloxone, has been an important life-saving intervention. In 2023, as part of expanding access, the US Food and Drug Administration made naloxone available over the counter, with an average cost of \$45 for a nasal formulation. Prior to this, if a patient was prescribed, their insurance would cover naloxone. For example, I had surgery in April 2023 at Johns Hopkins Hospital, and my insurance, Carefirst BCBS covered the co-prescribed naloxone with no co-pay.

In 2017, Maryland Medicaid required naloxone to be offered for all the Medicaid managed care plans offered in the state with a copay of \$1. HB 736 keeps with the Maryland tradition to cover over the counter naloxone and keep it affordable with a price cap of \$10. I am aware that Massachusetts Blue Cross and Blue Shield announced in 2023 that they will cover over the counter naloxone. With all of the rules and regulations states pass, if there is not a connection between policy and practice, the results remain the same – fatal and non-fatal overdoses remain high.

HB 736 will help ensure naloxone is available for Marylanders who receive Medicaid benefits, and to ensure that it is affordable. With most overdoses happening in the home, having access to this lifesaving medication is needed to save lives. HB 736 will help not just patients, but caregivers, family members and bystanders have affordable overdose reversal medications and I urge your favorable support.

Sincerely,

Deborah Burrell  
President, Burrell International Group, LLC &  
SMART Maryland Board Member & SMART Healthcare Chair  
dburrell@burrellig.com

Frederick County Resident

301-401-9490