

**Senate Bill 427 Public Health – Overdose and Infectious Disease
Prevention Services Program**

Finance Committee

February 20, 2024

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 Senate Bill 427.

SB 427 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-related intoxication continues to grow. Americans are now more likely to die from opioid overdoses than car crashes.¹ 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 2,500 Marylanders lost their lives to an overdose from October 2022-September 2023.²

This is a public health crisis that cries out for new solutions. The program proposed in SB 427 is modeled after programs that have a 30+ year track record of preventing overdose deaths, HIV and hepatitis, and other diseases, and of helping people with substance use disorder find treatment and other needed social services. As of August 2022, 147 of these programs are providing services in 91 communities across 16 countries.

Overdose prevention sites are critical components in the battle to reduce overdose deaths in our state. For this reason, MHAMD supports SB 427 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 <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/799cc6c21cf94e89a174fa06532febd9>

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865