

LOBBY DAY 2017 TALKING POINTS HB 519: SAFE CONSUMPTION SITES

**This document is for Health Care for the Homeless staff use only.*



What is HB 519?

HB 519, or the Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Safer Drug Consumption Facility Program, would allow community-based organizations to establish sites for the safe consumption of drugs in a controlled environment.

What are key arguments against HB 519?

- It communicates that drug use is OK—and even encourages it.
 - Opponents of needle exchanges made the same case, and last year the General Assembly overwhelmingly passed and the governor signed into law a bill authorizing local health departments and community-based organizations to establish sterile syringe exchange programs with approval from the state’s Department of Health & Mental Hygiene.
- Providing those suffering from addiction with a place and tools to keep using heroin is reckless. Unconscionable.
- There are provisions in that would give health care practitioners immunity from prosecution for providing the treatment described in the bills.

What are key arguments for HB 519?

- Drug use is happening. So, how do we address that in a way that people don’t die, while connecting them to much-needed services?
- As with needle exchange programs, research shows definitively that safe consumption sites help reduce harm to users and others.
- Maryland is in an opioid crisis: The total number of overdose deaths has risen steadily in the state since 2010, mainly due to the increase in heroin-related deaths.

Is a safe consumption site the same as a safe injection site?

- Safe injection sites are for opioid drug users and are very much an overdose prevention intervention.
- Safe consumption sites typically span a broader range of drugs—such as cocaine and even alcohol—and are more about keeping users and others safe when they are impaired and community integration than overdose and death prevention.

- The way HB 519 is written, the local jurisdiction has the autonomy to designate whether its safe consumption site is for users of injected drugs or a broader range of drugs, such as cocaine and alcohol.
- Infectious disease prevention is prominently stated throughout the bill, suggesting it would be a powerful tool in tackling our opioid crisis.

Are that many people really dying from opioid drug use?

- 86% of all intoxication deaths in Maryland in 2015 were opioid-related.
- The number of opioid-related deaths increased by 23% from 2014 to 2015, and have more than doubled since 2010. (Source: Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene)

Why does Health Care for the Homeless support HB 519?

- For decades, our policies have taken a zero-tolerance approach to drug use, shaming drug users and excluding them from much needed care.
- Meantime, drug use has increased.
- At Health Care for the Homeless, we support and advocate for harm reduction policies that prioritize the health of all our neighbors—including those suffering from opioid addiction.
- Safe consumption sites are proven to improve health outcomes by drastically reducing the spread of infectious diseases, including HIV and Hepatitis C, helping drug users receive addiction treatment and preventing drug overdose and death.

OK, so in a nutshell, we need safe consumption sites because:

- They **reduce disease transmission** and save lives by preventing overdose
- They **provide sterile equipment** and trained medical staff to oversee drug use
- They **connect drug users with needed services** like addiction counseling
- They **save money** and resources by reducing use of emergency medical services
- They **already exist in 65+ cities** around the world