

Talking Points: HB 464/SB 990—Overdose Prevention Site Program Authorization

BILL SYNOPSIS

HB 464 House Health and Government Operations Committee

SB 990 Lead sponsor: Sen. Shelly Hettleman • Senate Finance Committee

This bill authorizes up to six Overdose Prevention Sites in Maryland, where people can use substances with immediate access to life saving interventions, medical care, emotional support and non-judgmental, therapeutic relationships. The sites would be authorized in two urban areas, two suburban areas and two rural across Maryland.

BILL BACKGROUND

- This bill has been introduced for the past five years, but the issue is gaining momentum and needs our help to elevate it further.

BILL TALKING POINTS

- More than 2,100 people died from opioid overdose in 2018 in Maryland
 - There have been ZERO overdose deaths inside the more than 150 OPS centers that operate around the world. In a Canadian OPS, overdose fatality dropped 35% in the area
- Sites like these have been proven to reduce spread of disease like HIV and Hepatitis C and to improve the overall health of substance users.
 - A single OPS in Baltimore is predicted to bring 121 additional people into drug treatment in the first year.
- They provide a safe place to connect with support services and reduce use of emergency medical services.
 - A Baltimore study estimated that a single OPS would save the health care system \$7.8 million each year.

BILL PUSHBACK...

- Having a safe place to use drugs will result in higher drug use and crime
 - **Possible response:** *The evidence actually shows the opposite. Every study has shown that overdose prevention facilities decrease nuisance and public order concerns in surrounding areas, do not increase loitering and even reduce crime. Over three years, an OPS in Canada helped 67% of participants get into drug treatment services, and 23% stopped injecting entirely.*
- Substance use is illegal and should result in arrest.
 - **Possible response:** *Every day, we see the importance of treating substance use as a public health issue, not a criminal one: We would never penalize a diabetic for not wanting to take their insulin or eating sugary foods, but we continue to penalize people for substance use disorder, a disease of the brain that actually changes how the brain works.*
- Overdose Prevention Sites violate federal drug law.
 - **Possible response:** *A recent lawsuit in Philadelphia put this question to bed. On October, 2, 2019, a federal judge ruled that these programs—which operate for the purpose of saving lives and preventing overdose deaths—do not violate the law.*