



## HOWARD COUNTY OFFICE OF COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Delegate Shane Pendergrass, Chair  
Health and Government Operations Committee  
House Office Building, Room 241  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Testimony **IN SUPPORT** of House Bill 319: General Provisions – Commemorative Days –  
Overdose Awareness

Dear Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and Members of the Committee,

Though Howard County has seen a 27 percent decrease in nonfatal overdoses from 2017 through 2021, drug overdoses continue to hit our Maryland communities hard. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) show that from April 2020 to April 2021, deaths from overdose rose 21 percent in Maryland.

House Bill 319 would require the Governor to annually proclaim August 31<sup>st</sup> as Overdose Awareness Day, part of a global effort to end overdoses. Since I took office in 2019, Howard County opened both Howard House and Hilda's Place, which are treatment houses for men and women recovering from substance misuse disorders. We also opened Sheppard Pratt's new campus in ElkrIDGE, which contains 17 medically managed detox beds for people with co-occurring mental health challenges. Additionally, we provide nearly \$600,000 annually to support behavioral health navigation support.

I remain committed to expanding access to life-saving treatment and developing solutions to have a more robust overdose response strategy. We have invested \$1.5 million in residential treatment facilities to create a continuum of care that funds case managers, peer support specialists and a reliable transportation network. The County also provides nearly \$600,000 annually to support behavioral health navigation. Finally, over the past year our Health Department has trained nearly 600 people in its Overdose Response program, which includes naloxone administration. They have also distributed 550 naloxone kits and more than 4,500 Detera Bags, which allow for safe drug disposal.

The public acknowledgment of this day of awareness would help diminish the stigma of those who have lost their lives to substance misuse and the grief of the families and loved ones left behind. The tragic loss of life is preventable with proper access to care, community support and continued investments from public/private partnerships.

Publicly destigmatizing what has long been perceived as criminal behavior, a private family matter or source of shame would be a step in the direction towards healing and recovery. I welcome your partnership on this critical acknowledgement and urge a favorable report on HB 319.

All the Best,

Calvin Ball  
Howard County Executive