



House Bill 1082

Heroin and Opioid Education and Community Action Act of 2017 *(Start Talking Maryland Act)*

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

Date: March 7, 2017

To: Health and Government Operations Committee

From: Natasha Mehu & Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 1082 as it seeks to reduce overdose deaths and prevent addiction by focusing on Maryland's public education system as a means for spreading awareness and providing necessary services. The bill also directs funding to mitigate costs associated with launching these programs.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

HB 1082 requires the State Board of Education to develop age appropriate drug addiction and education programs in primary and secondary schools. Teachers for these programs are to be trained in drug addiction and education programs. This approach recognizes the need to teach children about the dangers of addiction at an early age. The children would gain reasonable knowledgeable about the issues well before they ever have to confront them in a peer or other setting.

The bill also directs local school boards to have school nurses trained to administer opioid overdose medication and schools equipped with the opioid overdose medication. A number of local schools have already taken steps to have staff trained and equipped to take action during an opioid overdose. It is an unfortunate reality that overdoses can occur at any place and time. In the event emergency services are unable to arrive in time, a trained school nurse could save a student's life.

A novel component of HB 1082 requires each local board of education, in collaboration with the local health departments, to hire a community action official to coordinate school-based community forums and conduct public relations efforts. Counties believe this builds upon local school-based awareness campaigns and forums by providing an official that can help coordinate across schools in a county or across county school departments if necessary.

HIGHER EDUCATION

HB1082 requires higher education institutions that receive state funding to establish heroin and opioid education and prevention policies. The policies shall require special awareness training for incoming students, campus police, and health personnel. While alcohol abuse information has become a staple at college campuses, current circumstances make it clear that freshman need to also receive opioid awareness trainings.

DRUG COURTS

Finally, the bill also directs the state court administrator to assess drug court programs and includes \$2 million in grants to expand the scope of drug court programs to meet local needs. Drug courts serve an important role in diverting individuals into treatment instead of court when appropriate.

The opioid epidemic continues to be a threat to the lives and livelihood of Maryland residents. HB 1082 uses the state's education system as a base for providing tools and resources to tackle the heroin and opioid epidemic. For these reasons, MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on HB 1082.