



Senate Bill 641

Public Health – Substance Abuse Treatment Outcomes Partnership Fund

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Finance Committee

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From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** SB 641, MACo's initiative legislation to modernize and optimize several laws and programs to help counties combat the spiraling drug crisis. Drug-related deaths and crises continue to rise in epidemic proportions. Counties in all regions need support and coordination among state and local agencies - with appropriate local flexibility - to bridge remaining gaps.

As part of its 2015 legislative initiatives, MACo advocates for comprehensive legislation and budget initiatives to address the growing opioid problem confronting each county and the unique needs of their communities. SB 641 would give local governments greater flexibility to use certain grant funds for substance abuse treatment and related prevention and outreach efforts.

SB 641 revitalizes the Substance Abuse Treatment Outcomes Partnership (STOP) fund program housed in the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. The grant program supports targeted substance abuse treatment services and populations, as proposed by county governments in response to local needs. STOP was created by a previous MACo initiative in 2001, and in FY 15, nineteen counties were awarded STOP funds totaling some \$6.4 million. While additional funding would be welcome, SB 641 does not mandate any new funding level or process. STOP funding is in addition to and does not replace other State budget appropriations for substance abuse treatment and awarded funds would continue to supplement not supplant any current funding a jurisdiction is receiving for substance abuse.

SB 641 expands the eligible uses for grant funds to reflect the shifting demographics and challenges in addressing substance abuse. Under current law, STOP funds are limited to certain eligible populations such as mothers of drug-addicted infants; needy families receiving temporary cash assistance; adolescents; and pretrial and prerelease correctional inmates. SB 641 expands the eligible uses to include transportation to and from treatment

services; coordination staff; data sharing; community emergency behavioral health services or crisis stabilization units; and substance abuse counseling in schools. The bill reasonably allows for a participating county to use STOP funding to continue or to expand any eligible program that has been in operation since October 1, 2010.

Additionally, SB 641 encourages State agencies that interact with certain vulnerable populations to incorporate strategies for addressing substance abuse as part of their charge. The bill urges the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention as part of its duties to make it a priority to provide support for substance abuse treatment and prevention programs that contribute to increased public safety outcomes. Many people cycling through the criminal justice system are suffering from substance abuse and are in need of treatment.

The bill also urges the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the State Department of Education to work collaboratively with local stakeholders to develop community-based education and prevention programs for adolescents. It is important to ensure that adolescents are provided evidence-based substance abuse education and can be connected to treatment services if needed. It is also important that parents have resources to use to help them discuss substance abuse with their children.

The challenges in addressing substance abuse necessitate a multi-pronged strategy that addresses the health, safety, and education of the public. SB 641 expands the eligible uses of funds under the STOP grant program to reflect changes in the need for prevention, treatment, education, and outreach options. For these reasons MACo urges a **FAVORABLE** report on SB 641.