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TO: The Honorable Peter A. Hammen, Chair
Members, House Health and Government Operations Committee
The Honorable Clarence K. Lam

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
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DATE: February 16, 2016

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 468 – *Public Health – Opioid-Associated Disease
Prevention and Outreach Programs*

On behalf of the Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers (MACHC) and the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP), we support House Bill 468.

House Bill 468 authorizes the establishment of sterile needle exchange programs statewide. Based on the successful programs that have been operational in Baltimore City and Prince George's County, this legislation seeks to expand and enhance the proven efficacy of these programs and establishes a framework that reflects the history, experience, expertise and positive outcomes demonstrated by the existing programs.

The evidence is undisputed – sterile needle exchange programs are a cost-effective approach to preventing the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C, which are often transmitted between persons that inject drugs. These programs are able to engage these individuals in infectious disease screening, referral for treatment, long-term care or pre-exposure prophylaxis. They have demonstrated a marked reduction in the incidence of HIV and Hepatitis C in areas in which the programs operate.

Syringe exchange programs also enhance the collection of data and information on substance-related disorder trends and patterns. Overdose deaths in Maryland have increased dramatically. Syringe exchange programs provide an opportunity to administer overdose prevention education and distribute naloxone directly to individuals at risk of overdose. They also create an opportunity to link individuals who inject drugs to substance-related disorder treatment and other health services.

Expansion of these cost-effective programs statewide is a critical component of Maryland's commitment to addressing the increasing incidence of overdose deaths, infectious diseases, and related health and social consequences associated with injected drug use. They are programs that have been supported by both law enforcement and public health officials. It is essential they be authorized statewide. A favorable report on House Bill 468 is requested.

For more information call:

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