Maryland-DC Society of Addiction Medicine
A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine

MDDCSAM is the Maryland state chapter of the American Society of Addiction Medicine whose members are physicians and other health providers who treat people with substance use disorders.

HB 529 LETTER OF INFORMATION
Code Revision - Health - Maryland Medical Assistance Program
Health Committee February 17, 2026

We are writing to applaud the bill's removal of stigmatizing language, which has profound implications. It replaces the stigmatizing terms "substance abuse" or "alcohol and drug abuse" with the term "substance use disorder," and replaces "substance abusing" with the term "with substance use." **Seemingly small changes in language can make a huge difference and can literally save lives.**

In a randomized trial of over 500 clinicians, those who read a scenario describing either a "substance abuser" - vs. the same scenario about an individual "having a substance use disorder" - were significantly more likely to conclude that the character was personally culpable and that punitive measures should be taken. (1)

Addiction-related stigma prevents people from reaching out for help and isolates families affected by the disease who fear being judged. Disparaging and inaccurate terminology suggest that individuals choose to be addicted, or suffer a lack of willpower. (www.addictionpolicy.org)

In 2018, 16 percent of individuals with a substance use disorder SUD did not seek treatment because they worried that it would have a negative impact on their employment; and approximately 15 percent felt it would impact their community's view of them. Substance use disorder is one of the most stigmatized psychiatric conditions on earth. Nearly half of Americans do not think that addiction is a disease. **(2)**

In 2013, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fifth Edition (DSM-5) abandoned the term substance "abuse" and adopted the term "substance use disorder.

Respectfully,
Joseph Adams, MD, FASAM, addiction & internal medicine, Co-Chair, Public Policy Committee, MDDCSAM

REFERENCES:
(1) Kelly JF, et al. Does it Matter How We Refer to Individuals With Substance-Related Conditions? A Randomized Study of Two Commonly Used Terms. Int J Drug Policy. 2010 May;21(3):202-7.
(2) Stop the Stigma: Tackling the Stigma of Addiction through Education. Updated: Oct 17, 2022. www.addictionpolicy.org