



Dear Co-chairs Prozanski and Knopf, and members of the committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Health Justice Recovery Alliance (HJRA), a statewide advocacy organization that represents BHRN and other community providers of substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, harm reduction, and recovery services. We are writing in support of SB 610 and the forthcoming amendments.

HJRA has been part of ongoing conversations about SB 610, and though we would prefer to see the OAC maintain its decision-making authority, this bill represents a meaningful compromise by maintaining the OAC as an advisory body to OHA, and by maintaining that the BHRN grant process be conducted through OHA, our state's behavioral health agency.

Although SB 610 changes the OAC from granting authority to grant advisor, we want to emphasize how imperative it is we continue to hold those with lived experience and the communities most impacted by the war on drugs at the center of these conversations. Those most harmed must have a seat at the table to inform what healing truly looks like for their communities. The Oversight & Accountability Council is a transformational body that has given these voices a seat at the table, and they have much to be proud of.

The OAC has reframed the conversation around harm reduction and recovery services, while expanding access to care for some of our most vulnerable and impacted community members. The OAC has made meaningful investments in communities that, for far too long, have suffered the disproportionate impacts of criminalization. They have made funding decisions to address the social determinants of health and root causes of problematic substance use, while investing in services across the continuum of addiction care. At a time when we're still losing about four people each day to preventable overdoses, the OAC has shown up again and again, volunteering their time in the name of saving lives and helping people access care and support. They have expanded access to culturally and linguistically-specific services that make recovery accessible to more people in their own language, and able to receive services from someone who understands their culture and identity — which is critical to ensuring the success of one's recovery journey. We are grateful for their service, and want to recognize the important role they have played in creating solutions to this crisis.

We must ensure with this change that the OAC's valuable lived experience and expertise not be watered down in the system once again through over-bureaucratizing their critical role. Moving forward, we hope that OHA will continue to honor the integral perspective of the OAC by centering them in all decision-making, policy, and ongoing support for the BHRNs in their new statutory role.

Sincerely,

Devon Downeysmith

On behalf of the Health Justice Recovery Alliance