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**BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT  
COMMITTEE**

*Mission Statement*

On behalf of the Citizens of Baltimore City, the mission of the **Public Health and Environment Committee** is dedicated to safeguarding the well-being of Baltimore's residents by advancing policies that promote health equity, environmental justice, and sustainability. Recognizing the deep connection between public health and the environment, the committee works to reduce health disparities, improve access to essential services, and address climate-related challenges that impact communities.

**The Honorable Phylicia Porter  
Chair**

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025  
10:00 AM**

**COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**RECONVENING HEARING**

*Legislative Oversight #LO25-0021*

**City's Response to the Opioid Crisis**

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Paris Gray  
*Staff: Ethan Navarre (410-396-1266)*

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# CITY OF BALTIMORE

Brandon M. Scott – Mayor  
Zeke Cohen – Council President



## Office of Council Services

Nancy Mead - Director  
100 Holliday Street, Room 415  
Baltimore, MD 21202

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### BILL SYNOPSIS

**Committee: Public Health and Environment**

**Legislative Oversight: LO25-0021**

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### City's Response to the Opioid Crisis

#### RECONVENING HEARING

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**Sponsor:** Councilmembers Porter, et al

**Introduced:** June 16, 2025

#### **Purpose:**

**For the purpose:** to provide a platform for city agencies, healthcare providers, and community advocates to discuss ongoing challenges, identify service gaps, and explore policy solutions to enhance Baltimore's collective response to opioid addiction and overdose prevention.

Effective: Upon enactment.

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#### **Agency Attending/Reporting**

- Representative(s) from: Mayor's Office
  - Representative(s) from: Health Department
  - Representative(s) from: Fire Department
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### Analysis

#### **Background**

On July 9, 2025 the committee held its first hearing for the City's Response to the Opioid Crisis. Following are notes taken during the hearing:

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## **Major Speakers**

- Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Mayor's Office
- Alice Smith, Agency Representative
- Jennifer Harm, Agency Representative
- Sharon Green, Agency Representative
- Christine Ogbue, Health Department
- Chief James Matz, Fire Department
- Public Testimony/Speakers
  - Darci Curwen-Garber, Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition
  - Ricardo Burks, Health Care for the Homeless (Baltimore)
  - Catalina Byrd, Speaker
  - Vern McCormick, Speaker
  - Candy Kerr, Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition
  - Angelina C. Williams, Community Association
  - Bakari Atiba, Charm City Care Connection
  - Charlene Bees, Morrell Park
  - Marguerite Lanaux, Office of the Public Defender
  - Jodie Jackson, Morrell Park
  - August Paige, Speaker

## **Major Issues Discussed**

1. Councilwoman Porter, primary sponsor of the Resolution gave opening remarks. Some remarks were: "This hearing was a "long time" coming, I would like to see the end to "generation addiction." She also talked about some of the goals for moving forward with the different hearings already scheduled.
2. Public Testimony was allowed first (Approximately twelve [12] speakers). Some comments, topics of discussion and/or concerns were:
  - Life as an addict and road to recovery
  - The affordable housing crisis
  - Homelessness
  - Increase in Mental Health issues
  - Cuts to Medicaid
    - Many organizations will fold!
  - Statistical data regarding the Opioid Crisis
  - Would like for similar programs to come together in collaboration to address this issue
  - The role of overdose prevention centers
  - More outreach is needed
  - Importance of meeting people where they are!
  - Need more drop in centers
  - Concerns of Residents
    - It is time to prioritize the needs of all citizens, not just the needs of addicts!
    - Neglecting the rest of the community for addicts is unfair!
    - Community has become infested with drug addicts!
    - Trash – is of concern
    - Theft/Stealing in community is on the increase – is of concern
      - Can't have packages delivered!

- People doing drugs, needles on the street, people half-dressed, standing on corners – is of concern
  - Biggest Concern – our children should not have to grow-up in this environment!
    - Concerned for our school aged children!
  - Programs seem to be unproductive
  - We are asking the Council for help enforcing petty crimes! And, if possible send them to program clinics outside of the city!
  - Overdose Centers affects communities negatively!
  - Scared of possible retaliation
  - Some discussion regarding homeownership versus Section Eight (8)
  - Representative from Public Defender’s Office
    - Peer intervention works – it is data-proven!
    - Incarceration does not produce good outcomes!
    - Expansion of programs are needed
    - The Public Defender’s Office stands in solidarity to assist with this issue!
3. Several agency representatives were in attendance and joined together to present and discuss a PowerPoint Presentation. **A copy is on file.**
4. Committee/council members asked questions, stated concerns, and made comments. Some highlighted topics of discussion, comments and/or concern were:
- Question(s)/Comments/Concerns/etc.:
    - Agency Coordination
      - Walk us through how agencies work together to actualize this plan while considering all residents and/or communities.
    - Concern: The exhaustion that is happening in communities!
    - Sense of Urgency: Interagency collaboration between agencies as it relates to substance abuse!
    - **Requested by Chairwoman Porter: To Mayor’s Office: Provide and/or share data on a bi-annual (every six months) basis, the information/data received from the Overdose Stats.**
    - Reduction of Overdose Deaths
      - The goal is to reduce overdose deaths by 40% by a specific time!
        - What date and year will you begin collecting data?
        - Do you think the percentage should be higher?
    - Medicaid/Medicare Role in Treatment
      - Are you tracking data by age, race, etc.?
    - Safe Consumption Sites
      - Is there a plan within the plan for such sites?
    - Community Partnerships
      - How does the City and State work on these issues, such as over-concentrated areas and outreach?
    - Overdose Prevention Centers
      - Talked about the importance of recovery!
      - Comments regarding unnecessary overdose deaths
      - Is thankful for the many partners in Baltimore city relating to harm reduction!
      - Comments regarding the location of prevention centers
      - Question: Are we developing a clear understanding of where the needs are needed in the city?

5. Chairwoman Porter gave closing remarks, “she talked about the importance of interagency collaboration/coordination. This conversation must be on-going based on what was discussed today! We can’t afford any more lives loss! We need specific outcomes; need to get it right this time.” She thanked the Mayor’s Office for sending (bringing together) the many different opinions!
6. Hearing recessed..

On Wednesday, October 22, 2025, the committee will reconvene the hearing.

Also, attached are *some recent news articles* pertaining to the subject matter at hand.

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### Additional Information

**Fiscal Note:** None

**Information Source(s):** Notes taken during the July 9, 2025 committee hearing.

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*Marguerite Currin*

Analysis by: Marguerite Currin  
Analysis Date: October 20, 2025

Direct Inquiries to: (443) 984-3485

## Baltimore City Mayor Scott announces 15-year plan to address the opioid crisis



[WBAL Radio](#)

Oct 10, 2025

Baltimore is set to award \$2 million in community grants aimed at preventing overdoses, following an announcement from the mayor's office. The funds are part of the approximately \$600 million the city has obtained from opioid settlements with pharmaceutical companies. The grants will be distributed across three tiers \$500,000 for mobile treatment services with harm reduction components, \$250,000 for harm reduction programs like syringe exchanges and naloxone distribution, and \$50,000 for social support services such as housing and food assistance. The mayor's office emphasized the need for expanded services in areas like Penn North, which has experienced three mass overdoses since July. The mayor said, "They have the department. They were out there yesterday. They been out there. Right. We this is a neighborhood to they're going to continue to be focused on. And we will we will do everything in our part as we continue to do with these use addiction here in Baltimore, noting that they're not just a Baltimore issue." Concerns have been raised about the effectiveness of the funding and whether it will attract more drug users to the city. Critics worry that Baltimore might become a magnet for drug users due to the availability of services like food, housing, and Narcan. The mayor responded to suggestions of increased law enforcement in Penn North, saying, "You would have to assume that all of the folks that overdosed, bought, they drove directly at North. We also have to be reminded that Penn North is a transportation hook." The city plans to begin accepting applications for the grants on October 23. Some funds will support mobile units that provide drug-related services, but there are calls for more permanent solutions. Critics argue that a base camp or rehab facility should be established in Penn North to offer long-term support and self-sufficiency for drug users. The mayor's office has outlined a 15-year plan to address the opioid crisis, with \$87 million in grant agreements for 21 community-based organizations. However, concerns remain about the potential for abuse and whether the funds will effectively reach those in need.

## Baltimore City Council President Zeke Cohen addresses the ongoing drug crisis in Penn North



[WBAL Radio](#)

Oct 13, 2025

Baltimore City Council President Zeke Cohen shared his insights on the drug crisis in Penn North and the city's approach to spending during a recent studio interview, emphasizing the need for recovery-focused spending and internal capacity building within city government. Cohen, who began his career teaching in Penn North, expressed concern over the area's persistent issues, noting that it looks as bleak now as it did when he first started. "I remember the experience of young people walking to school through drug corners and more liquor stores than grocery stores," Cohen said, highlighting the challenges faced by children in the area. Cohen emphasized the need to address open-air drug dealing and focus on recovery, suggesting that the city should use its resources to tackle root causes rather than dispersing funds across numerous nonprofits. "Let's honor the victims of this crisis by attacking the root causes by using the money to move on the big issues," Cohen said. Regarding the citation docket, Cohen described it as a middle ground for accountability without resorting to mass incarceration. "It was not accountability in a jail cell where you're severed from your family," Cohen said, explaining the approach of mandating community service or treatment. Cohen defended the impact of Safe Streets, acknowledging its role in mediating conflicts and contributing positively to the community. "I absolutely think it is having an impact," Cohen said, noting the importance of providing alternatives and opportunities to those involved in the program. Cohen also addressed transparency concerns surrounding the Baltimore Children's and Youth Fund, co-sponsoring a bill to audit the fund and ensure accountability. "I think all this bill does is say we're going to audit the money," Cohen said, emphasizing the need for clear rules for accessing the fund. On the topic of the Department of Public Works (DPW), Cohen acknowledged progress under new leadership but noted ongoing challenges related to worker safety and agency culture. "I think there's still a lot of challenges," Cohen said, emphasizing the need for continued oversight and potential legislation to ensure the safety of DPW workers. Throughout the interview, Cohen underscored the importance of collaboration among city leaders, expressing optimism about the city's progress in reducing violent crime and advocating for a united approach to addressing Baltimore's challenges. "I wish that they and everybody in their circles would see it as, look, we are stronger together," Cohen said.



## Zeke Cohen wants improved opioid services before handing out settlement money



Zeke Cohen, president of Baltimore's city council looks on during a press conference at City Hall, regarding the announcement of Baltimore's intent on passing the Housing Options and Opportunity Act. (Karl Merton Ferron/Staff)



By [Carson Swick](#) | [cswick@baltsun.com](mailto:cswick@baltsun.com)

**UPDATED: October 13, 2025 at 6:58 PM EDT**

Baltimore City Council President Zeke Cohen wants to ensure the city spends \$579 million it received from lawsuits against opioid distributors wisely.

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**25-0021R**

**AGENCY REPORTS  
AND/OR  
HANDOUTS**

**NONE AS OF THIS WRITING**

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**25-0021R**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**NONE AS OF THIS WRITING**