

Preamble

WHEREAS, Hepatitis C is a silent killer, being largely asymptomatic until irreversible liver damage may have occurred; and

WHEREAS, Hepatitis C has been characterized by the World Health Organization as a disease of primary concern to humanity; and

WHEREAS, Hepatitis C currently infects approximately 4.5 million persons in the United States, and each year there are some 30,000 new infections nationwide; and

WHEREAS, The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that approximately 12,000 persons die annually from the consequences of hepatitis C, and this number continues to grow each year; and

WHEREAS, The disease is considered to be such a public health threat that the United States Department of Health and Human Services has initiated a comprehensive plan to address this significant health problem, beginning with the identification of, and notification to, hundreds of thousands of persons who are inadvertently exposed to hepatitis C through blood transfusions; and

WHEREAS, In the absence of a vaccine for hepatitis C, emphasis must be placed on other means of awareness and prevention of this disease, including, but not limited to, education of persons at high risk for hepatitis C as defined by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as well as police officers, firefighters, health care workers, and the general public; and

WHEREAS, Educating the public and health care community throughout the State about hepatitis C will ensure an optimal approach to controlling this lethal disease; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That Section(s) 13-901 through 13-905 of Article - Health - General of the Annotated Code of Maryland be repealed.

SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED. That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article - Health - General

SUBTITLE 10. HEPATITIS C ~~ADVISORY COUNCIL~~ VIRUS.

18-1001.

AS FUNDS ARE AVAILABLE. THE DEPARTMENT SHALL:

(1) CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT TO DETERMINE THE INCIDENCE OF THE HEPATITIS C VIRUS IN THE STATE;

(2) INITIATE A STATEWIDE PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TARGETING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS IN THE STATE TO URGE HEPATITIS C VIRUS EDUCATION AND TESTING;