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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2018

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National Association of Counties Honors Harford County, Maryland with 2018 “Best in Category” Award for Anti-Heroin Efforts

Bel Air, Md., (May 22, 2018) - The National Association of Counties (NACo) has recognized Harford County’s efforts to raise awareness about opioid addiction through the arts with a 2018 “Best in Category” award in the Arts, Cultural, and Historic Preservation category. The NACo awards honor innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents. This is the Glassman administration’s second NACo Achievement Award for addiction prevention efforts, and its sixth NACo Award for excellence in county government in three years.

Heroin abuse is a national epidemic and a major public health problem; the drug’s impact in Harford County is both alarming and widespread. The Harford County Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP), partner agencies and stakeholders are racing to develop new resources and prevention methods, reduce stigma, and deepen understanding about addiction. In addition, ODCP sought to invite new ideas and new voices, particularly youth, to the conversation. To accomplish this and further engage citizens, ODCP and its partners helped to spark conversations about prevention through cultural arts programs. To date, ODCP has offered three prevention programs that employ the arts: “Addicted,” a play locally written and directed by Christle Henzel; a PSA audio-visual competition; and the HOPE Against Addiction Art Contest and Calendar. Together these programs have reached more than 175,000 citizens.

“Addicted”

This powerful drama was written and directed by North Harford High School psychologist Christle Henzel and included the school’s students and alumni as actors. The play takes an honest look at the impact of drug and alcohol abuse on individuals, their relationships and their family members. “Addicted” is performed through a series of monologues that portray the struggle of three young adults suffering from addiction to different substances. Performances have been highlighted in the ABC News special, “A Community in Crisis” and used as an educational tool for high schools, colleges, churches, and the recovery community. More than 2,500 students, parents, and citizens have attended “Addicted” showings since 2015.

Public Service Announcement (PSA) Competition

In 2017, the Office of Drug Control Policy launched a video competition, asking students “How would you keep your friends from abusing drugs?” The competition invited young people ages 11 - 18 to create 30-second public service announcements warning their peers about the dangers of heroin and other drugs. The contest was developed to build a

library of peer-to-peer messages that resonate with youth. Peer-to-peer messaging is recommended by experts in the field of addiction and by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan's Heroin Task Force. It provided an opportunity for youth to raise awareness and inspire others to take action to prevent drug abuse. The winning entries debuted in local movie theaters on June 30, 2017. The PSAs were viewed by 170,000 moviegoers and helped bridge the "summer gap" in county drug prevention messaging provided in the public schools. All three winning entries can be found on the county website at www.harfordcountymd.gov/ODCP.

APG Federal Credit Union sponsored the competition and provided gift cards to the winners. Other partners in the video contest included Harford County public schools, libraries, the sheriff's office, health department, and PTAs.

HOPE Against Addiction Art Contest and Calendar

Developed through a partnership among ODCP, the Harford County Sheriff's Office, faith-based communities and community advocates, this art contest and related calendar were created to help raise awareness about addiction and recovery. Equally important, the program celebrates individuals taking strides to put their lives back together.

The art competition was advertised in the community and included four different age categories for students from elementary to high school and adults. Artists were asked to submit an art composition that revealed what addiction and recovery meant to them. First, second and third place winners were awarded gift cards for each category, and selected submissions are included in an annually printed calendar. Five hundred calendars are printed and sold each year for \$20, with 100% of the proceeds used to support individuals seeking treatment. In the last two years, more than 100 individual art pieces have been submitted.


"The play 'Addicted,' our PSA Competition, and the HOPE Against Addiction Art Contest and Calendar are helping to reframe conversations about substance use and addiction in Harford County," County Executive Barry Glassman said. "Using the arts has been an effective way to engage our youth to address issues that directly affect them. The arts also provide opportunities to use creativity, engage individuals who learn differently, and to discuss issues openly without judgement."

Speaking about their awards program, NACo President Roy Charles Brooks said, "Counties seize opportunities to deliver services more efficiently and build stronger communities every day. Achievement Award-winning programs are examples for counties that are determined to enhance services for our residents."

County Executive Glassman and Office of Drug Control Policy Administrator Joe Ryan will attend the NACo Conference in July to accept this prestigious award. They have also been honored with an invitation to address NACo's Arts and Culture Commission meeting to share information about the Harford County programs and advise other counties that are facing the opioid crisis.

For more information about Harford County's prevention programs, please visit www.harfordcountymd.gov/ODCP .

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