



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony of Senator Jill P. Carter
In Favor of SB0704 - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration –
Decriminalization
Before the Judicial Proceedings Committee
on March 3, 2020**

Mr. Chairman, Vice chair, and Members of the Committee:

This bill is about public health. It is about decriminalizing drug addiction. It is about public safety. It is about protecting law enforcement officers.

What this bill does is simply make it no longer illegal to possess syringes or other items commonly used to prepare and inject illegal drugs.

Research shows that those who fear arrest for paraphernalia are much more likely to share and reuse supplies. But, if it is legal to possess syringes, IV drug users will be safe to get clean needles rather than reuse their supplies. They would rather run the risk of infections such as HIV, tetanus, and hepatitis than hazard an arrest.

Because possessing needles is illegal, there is intense pressure to ditch used syringes immediately rather than hold on to them until they can dispose of them properly. Dumping used needles on the street puts the general public at risk.

The first thing a police officer asks someone they are about to search is, “Do you have any needles or anything else that can stick me?”. If possessing a needle is illegal, it is less likely one will admit to it. This puts the officer in harm’s way.

People involved in syringe service programs are still getting arrested and charged. Although the fiscal note shows that cases charged under the current law are typically dismissed, the process of being arrested and charged itself is the punishment. It is enormously disruptive to the person arrested. Having to go to court takes them away from their treatment. Having to meet with their attorney can cause them to miss a dose of buprenorphine. Recovery is a frail process. Any disruption could derail it entirely.

Lastly, if a patient can be honest with the pharmacist about why they are buying the syringes, she can talk to them about naloxone, as well. This alone could save lives.

For these reasons, and others to be discussed by the panelists, I urge a favorable report on SB 704 from this committee.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jill P. Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jill P. Carter