



# PROGRESSIVE MARYLAND

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## Testimony of Larry Stafford, Jr., Executive Director of Progressive Maryland

### SB 509 – Drug Paraphernalia for Administration – Decriminalization

February 16, 2022

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Thank you, Chair Smith and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 509.

I'm the Executive Director of Progressive Maryland, a statewide grassroots organization with over 100,000 members, supporters, and affiliates who live in nearly every legislative district across the state. Our mission is to improve the lives of working people and families in Maryland.

**Progressive Maryland supports the passage of SB 509 with the House sponsor amendment.** This common-sense legislation will decriminalize the possession of sterile syringes, hypodermic needles, and other paraphernalia that can be used to inject or consume controlled substances. It represents a meaningful public health effort to counteract the collateral spread of HIV, hepatitis, and other blood-borne diseases, and to encourage the safe disposal of used supplies.

We have seen the abysmal failures of the so-called War on Drugs. We know from physicians and experts on addiction that the continued criminalization of drug use has been ineffective and actively harmful, and that its impact has been especially damaging to members of low-income communities and communities of color. As overdose deaths continue to surge in Maryland and across the country, it's clear that it is indefensible to uphold outdated legal frameworks that prioritize criminalization over public health intervention.

Decriminalization of paraphernalia will decrease the spread of disease by reducing tendencies to share and reuse needles, and it will make it possible for community groups doing important harm reduction work to distribute clean tools. Ensuring that people who use drugs have the tools to do so in safer ways is better for everyone in our communities.

Thank you for considering Progressive Maryland's support for this urgent legislation. This bill is a small and extremely reasonable step to begin mending the harmful effects the ongoing criminalization of drug use has had in our state. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 509.**

Larry Stafford, Jr.  
Executive Director  
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