



Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
February 16, 2022

Senate Bill 509  
Criminal Law – Drug Paraphernalia for Administration – Decriminalization  
Support with Amendment

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*Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-existing opioid overdose death fatality crisis has worsened. In Maryland, the number of opioid-related deaths increased by 20% between 2019 and 2020, and preliminary data indicates a continued increase in 2021.*

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NCADD-Maryland supports Senate Bill 509 with an amendment to make the bill identical to the legislation this General Assembly passed last year. Maryland must focus on proven effective harm reduction strategies to save lives. The bill, with the amendment, will decriminalize possession and distribution of items that can be used to inject, ingest, inhale, or otherwise consume a controlled dangerous substance.

The decriminalization of paraphernalia will help ensure that people are accessing services such as syringe services programs and avoid arrest and incarceration. Just as importantly, the bill the General Assembly passed last year would have also supported and protected harm reduction workers who provide sterile syringes and other equipment to those using drugs. The bill you passed last year would have protected the person who picks up and delivers sterile equipment for their loved one who is quarantining because they have COVID.

In decriminalizing paraphernalia, we will reduce the need for people to re-use certain items that can contribute to the transmission of infectious diseases. This will have a positive public health impact on the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C, and save money in the reduction of needed health services.

We know the collateral damage caused by the war on drugs continues to harm people in Maryland, and disproportionately people of color. As this committee has heard repeatedly over the years, people with criminal records are too often denied employment, housing, food stamps, and scholarships, without any due consideration of the details involved in the records. **We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 509 with the amendment to make the bill match the bill you passed last year.**