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Date: February 20, 2024

Re: HB 1057 - Task Force to Study the Use and Possession of De Minimis  
Quantities of Controlled Dangerous Substances

Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Maryland House Judiciary Committee

Dear members of the committee,

My name is Mike Hilliard, and I am testifying on behalf of myself, having spent my 27-year policing career with the Baltimore Police Department, and as a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). LEAP is a non-profit organization of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety, working toward healing police-community relations, and addressing the root causes of crime.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to express my strong support for House Bill 1057, which would establish a task force to study the use and possession of de minimis quantities of controlled dangerous substances. As an officer, I believe the establishment of this task force would rebuild police-community trust, identify ways to help people stabilize their lives to recover from addiction, and lead to the creation of beneficial harm reduction services.

First, this bill would help increase police-community trust. As a patrolman with the Baltimore Police Department, I understood that community trust was paramount to our success in suppressing and preventing crime. In every interaction with the East Baltimore community, I saw that in order to solve the most serious crimes, we needed people to talk to us. Across policing, the research underscores that having trust from the people we serve [directly impacts public safety](#) because, without trust, people do not report crimes or cooperate with law enforcement. When we arrest someone for drug possession, the community sees us wasting taxpayer

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*Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition*

resources and punishing someone who needs treatment. By establishing a task force to study drug possession and alternatives to arrest, the community will be more open to working with us to investigate serious crime.

Second, this bill would help identify ways for people to stabilize their lives to recover from addiction. A criminal record can be a lifelong bar to opportunity. Individuals saddled with criminal penalties for simple possession are usually unable to stabilize their lives. A misdemeanor conviction can hinder an individual's access to employment, stable housing, and a range of public benefits, which increases chances of recidivism. By studying alternatives to criminal justice interventions, HB 1057 would reduce collateral consequences of [re-incarceration](#), [homelessness](#), and [unemployment](#).

Third, this bill would facilitate the study of evidence-informed, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and patient-centered substance use disorder treatment. Most notably, the task force can lead to the reduction in overdose deaths by establishing proven and effective harm reduction services. One solution is to implement Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs), which are safe spaces supervised by medical and harm reduction professionals. In 2021, two OPCs opened up in New York City, where staff [prevented 636 overdose deaths](#) and [averted 39,422 instances of public drug use](#) in their first year. In addition to [significantly reducing overdose deaths in their local communities](#), OPCs have also been shown to reduce [discarded syringes](#) and [crime](#).

In short, I believe this legislation would be beneficial to Maryland's public health and safety. The establishment of a task force to study the decriminalization of drug use and possession would rebuild police-community trust, identify ways to help people stabilize their lives to recover from addiction, and lead to the creation of beneficial harm reduction services.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective in support of this bill.

Respectfully,

Major Mike Hilliard (Ret.)  
Baltimore Police Department  
Speaker, Law Enforcement Action Partnership