

January 30, 2020

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
Chairman, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401



**RE: OPPOSITION of Senate Bill 218
(Crimes Involving Controlled Dangerous Substances – Penalties –
Methamphetamine)**

Dear Chair Smith and Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC), an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti- sex worker policies, opposes Senate Bill 218 (Crimes Involving Controlled Dangerous Substances – Penalties - Methamphetamine).

This bill seeks to increase the criminal penalty associated with the use, possession, or sale of methamphetamine. However, laws criminalizing possession of substances often do more harm than good. **More than 80% of arrests for drug law violations are for possession charges – not manufacturing or sale.** For many people who use drugs, particularly low-income people and people of color, the disruption of arrest and punishment creates barriers to accessing social services. We have seen firsthand the damage that involvement in the criminal legal system has on our neighbors. **Arrest is not a pathway to wellness, and increasing penalties associated with drug possession will only further marginalize people who use drugs and discourage them from seeking help or services.**

Marylanders have experienced disproportionately high overdose rates for decades due to the harmful drug war and limited options for increased health. In 2017, Governor Hogan declared a public health emergency due to escalating overdose rates fueled by fentanyl, a potent opioid. It's well documented in nearby jurisdictions that methamphetamine is adulterated with fentanyl, increasing risk of fatal overdose. Providing appropriate harm reduction services are proven to mitigate risk of fatal overdose, whereas arrest and involvement with the criminal legal system increases risk. **Maryland must focus legislative priorities on creating pathways to wellness, not further marginalizing those who are most at risk of overdose.**

BHRC respectfully requests the Committee give this measure an **unfavorable report**. Thank you for your consideration. For more information about BHRC or this position, please contact Tricia Christensen at Tricia@BaltimoreHarmReduction.org.