



February 9, 2021

The Honorable Delegate Kumar P. Barve
Chairman, House Environment and Transportation Committee
Room 251, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

**Re: House Bill 560 - Human Relations - Discrimination in Housing - Reentry-Into-Society
Status - FAVORABLE**

Dear Chairman Barve and House Environment and Transportation Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is 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. As a certified Overdose Response Program, Naloxone distributor, and syringe service program, we have provided essential health care services across the state for years.

BHRC supports efforts that increase legal protections and access to quality services for people engaged in drug use and sex work. The consistent incarceration of both of these groups of people is a crisis to our public health and our humanity. Over 145 years of drug prohibition policies have devastated communities across the country. BHRC supports broader efforts to gain community reparation from over a century of harm. **Preventing housing discrimination after re-entry from periods of incarceration is a critical step in prioritizing the health, dignity, and safety of all Marylanders.**

The relationship between homelessness, substance use, incarceration, survival behaviour, and racism are deeply intertwined. It is recognized that homelessness and incarceration share a bidirectional connection, meaning homelessness often leads to incarceration and vice versa. It is our Black residents who are most often subjected to this cycle of homelessness and incarceration, making up the majority of both homeless and incarcerated individuals in Maryland. Adding to this incredible injustice and experiences of marginalization is the increasingly deadly overdose epidemic.

During the first nine months of 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic flooded the U.S., drug and alcohol related intoxication deaths in Maryland reached a staggering 2,025 fatalities. Compared to the same period in 2019, overdose fatalities increased by over 35% among Black Marylanders.¹ In the midst of multiple intersecting public health crises, Marylanders deserve the modicum of relief that this bill provides by not allowing this type of routine housing discrimination to continue. It is the least we can do to begin a path towards repair for unjust laws and community devastation -- waged in part by mass criminalization and the war on drugs. We ask that the Environment and Transportation Committee give HB560 a favorable report.

¹Maryland Department of Health (Jan 2020). Unintentional Drug- and Alcohol-Related Intoxication Deaths* in Maryland Data update through 3rd quarter 2020.

For more information about Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition or our position, please contact our Director of Mobilization, Rajani Gudlavalleti at rajani@baltimoreharmreduction.org