



**House Judiciary Committee
February 2, 2021**

House Bill 488

Criminal Law - Use or Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance - De Minimis Quantity

Support

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) supports House Bill 488, to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of illegal substances.

Among the lessons we have learned from this country's failed war on drugs is that making substances illegal and locking people up for using them does not solve our problems. Perhaps it is time to try a different strategy. We look to countries like Portugal where decriminalization of drugs in 1999 has led to:

- Reductions in reported illicit drug use among the overall population;
- Reduced expenditures related to drug offenders in the criminal justice system;
- Increased uptake of drug treatment; and
- Reduction in drug-related deaths and the transmission of infectious diseases.

The money spent on enforcing possession laws in Maryland would go a long way toward providing an adequate continuum of services for people with substance use disorders, including prevention, treatment and recovery supports. Funds could be used to invest in education and prevention strategies, especially for young people. Funds could be used to provide outreach and support services to people with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Funds could create additional capacity for women with children who need intensive or residential levels of care.

There is also a significant racial disparity in the enforcement of drug possession laws. This was one of the main reasons the Maryland General Assembly decriminalized the possession of small amounts of cannabis. Despite that change, more than 70 percent of Maryland's prison population is African American, compared to 31 percent of the state population. Decriminalization is a smart and cost-effective way to address these issues.

We ask for your support of House Bill 488.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.