

To the members of the House Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of the clients, staff and surrounding community, I am writing to express that Charm City Care Connection is in support of HB0488 to decriminalize possession of certain substances in certain de minimis quantities.

As an organization that serves people who use drugs, we are keenly familiar with the devastating impact that criminalization has on the wellbeing of our clients. [Substance use disorder is an illness](#) that affects millions of people across the United States. The fact that our current legislation addresses this illness with criminalization is indicative of who is considered valuable and worthy in our state and society. Criminalizing the possession of substances has done nothing to mitigate the horrible, yet preventable, amount of overdose deaths occurring in Maryland. Criminalizing the possession of substances does not prevent people from acquiring, using or distributing drugs. It simply drives such actions and behaviors deeper underground, making them more risky and potentially dangerous. Such punitive policies also disproportionately target and impact people of color, especially black and latino people. There is plenty of qualitative and quantitative data which illustrates that the people most targeted by such policies are not the ones most likely to be in possession of substances. This does not mean that the response should be to lock up more white people. That benefits no one. The right response, one rooted in racial and restorative justice, is to decriminalize possession of drugs. Thi

Several countries around the world have successfully decriminalized possession of substances and have experienced great benefit to their social, economic, legal and medical systems. Portugal is most often cited, and data collected has shown us that, contrary to popular belief, decriminalization has not led to an increase in drug use or sale. In fact, they have experienced reductions in chaotic drug use, drug-related harms and overcrowding of jails and prisons. Additionally, decriminalization also resulted in decreased drug use among teenagers, decreased injection drug use and fewer HIV infections. Imagine the impact we could experience here in Maryland. This bill would remove barriers to social and economic mobility that many people face due to their criminal charges, thus improving the overall wellbeing of our residents and communities.

**This is a matter of justice, equity and health.** We hope you all will make the right decision for the people and pass HB0488. We are thankful to Delegate Moon for sponsoring HB0488 and leading the way toward legislation that heals instead of harms.

Thank you,

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## References

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