



February 2, 2021

The Honorable Luke Clippinger  
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee  
Room 101, House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**House Bill 488 - Criminal Law - Use or Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance - De Minimis Quantity - FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary 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. To supplement the life-saving services provided by us and dozens of harm reduction programs across the state, BHRC supports House Bill 488 (Criminal Law - Use or Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance - De Minimis Quantity).

The consistent incarceration of people who use drugs is a crisis to our public health and humanity. Over 145 years of criminalizing people who use drugs has devastated communities across the country. BHRC supports HB488 and broader efforts to gain community reparation from over a century of harm, and freedom from criminalization. Maryland must prioritize the health, dignity, and safety of people who use drugs, including systemic community healing after decades of over-policing and mass incarceration due to the war on drugs. Decriminalization of drug possession is the most effective action to reduce stigma associated with drug use because it enables people to feel safer about discussing their drug use with loved ones, service providers, and support networks.

An aspect of being targeted by the racist drug war is that our community and loved ones are also facing an increasingly deadly overdose epidemic. During the first nine months of 2020, as the deadly COVID-19 pandemic flooded the U.S. and Maryland, 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.<sup>1</sup>

Maryland legislators have taken laudable steps to reduce the devastation of the overdose crisis, but they do not go far enough to halt the overdose epidemic. The General Assembly has approved measures to expand access to the life-saving medication naloxone, increase behavioral health treatment, and establish syringe services programs throughout the state. While these essential policies have increased opportunities for health and safety, the situation remains dire.

---

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

In the midst of multiple intersecting public health crises, Marylanders deserve decriminalization and legalization efforts that include steps toward reparations, such as social equity provisions, housing assistance supports, and business licensing mandates. We ask that the Judiciary Committee give HB488 a favorable report.

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