

607 Shore Drive
Joppa, MD 21085
February 2, 2023

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

RE: HB173 - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration – Decriminalization--FAVORABLE

Dear Chairperson Clippinger,

My name is Karen Bratton, and I am a resident of District 7. I have been a resident of Maryland most of my life and have lived in Joppa for more than 30 years. I am writing to ask you to support HB173. My 40-year-old son, Tommy, lost his fight with addiction on June 23, 2022. After nine years in recovery, and trying to work two jobs, he had a relapse that cost him his life. The State Medical Examiner determined the cause of his death was Fentanyl. Tommy did not want to die and was actively pursuing recovery. After experiencing an indescribably painful loss that I would not wish on any parent, I recognize the role harm reduction could have played in saving him, and what role it can play in saving others moving forward.

The current Maryland drug policy criminalizes and stigmatizes people who use drugs, which does not encourage recovery. While the State of Maryland pumps almost one hundred million dollars annually into local substance abuse programs¹, current treatment options are mediocre at best and harmful at worst (detoxing from methadone or suboxone is worse than detoxing from heroin). And now there is a significantly tainted and deadly drug supply. You can take the first steps to change things for Maryland families.

Incarceration fails to reduce drug use² and the secondary diseases they cause – HIV, Hepatis B, endocarditis. Criminalizing the distribution of drug paraphernalia leads to people sharing and re-using syringes, which can spread bloodborne diseases and cause deadly infections. By continuing to criminalize the distribution of clean supplies for people who suffer from addiction, we are saying their

¹ The State of Maryland operating budget for FY22 shows that more than \$32M was allocated for block grants for substance abuse programs. An additional \$53M was allocated for Opioid State Targeted Response (STR) programs. This does not include money disbursed for substance use services via the State's Medicaid or MCHP programs.

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/imprisoning-drug-offenders-doesn-t-impact-use-study-says-n774346>

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lives and well-being do not matter—that they are “less than” and their disease is “less than.” My son mattered. Hundreds of thousands of other sons and daughters mattered³.

We need a compassionate approach to those who suffer from addiction, similarly to the compassion with which other diseases are viewed, treated, and managed. We need compassion so that they can stay alive long enough to choose recovery and many will, assuming they are still alive. Harm reduction legislation is a first step in the right direction. If you fail to act, the next death may be someone you know and love.

For these reasons, I am asking the Judiciary Committee to give HB173 a favorable report.

Sincerely,



Karen Bratton

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³ <https://nypost.com/2022/08/05/fentanyl-overdoses-killing-thousands-of-americans-whats-fueling-the-rise/>