



**2023 SESSION
POSITION PAPER**

BILL: HB 173 – Drug Paraphernalia for administration – Decriminalization

COMMITTEE: House Judiciary Committee

POSITION: Letter of Support

BILL ANALYSIS: HB 173 decriminalizes the possession of drug paraphernalia used to inject, ingest, inhale, or otherwise introduce controlled substances into the human body, thereby increasing access to supplies needed for safe substance use, reducing the spread of bloodborne infections, and reducing drug-related arrests and incarcerations.

POSITION RATIONALE: The Maryland Association of County Health Officers (MACHO) supports HB 173. HB 173 decriminalizes the possession of certain items that can be used by an individual to consume a controlled substance. The proposed decriminalization would increase access to supplies needed for safer substance use and encourage the use of clean syringes, thereby curbing the spread and limiting the financial impact of bloodborne pathogens. HB 173 will also prevent drug paraphernalia related arrests and incarceration.

Injection drug use and needle sharing are major modifiable risk factors for contracting blood-borne pathogens such as HIV and Hepatitis C. Approximately 120,000 cases of HIV are directly attributable to intravenous (IV) drug use and needle sharing.¹ Hepatitis C is the most common bloodborne infection in the U.S. and a leading cause of liver cirrhosis and liver cancer. Hepatitis C prevalence among IV drug users is over 33%.^{1,2} Both conditions place a substantial financial burden on the healthcare system, with the average lifetime cost of HIV treatment and Hepatitis C treatment costing \$370,000 and \$84,000, respectively.¹ Using clean needles and reducing needle sharing substantially decreases the risk of acquiring and transmitting HIV, Hepatitis C and other bloodborne pathogens. HB 173 reduces barriers to utilizing needle exchange services, which increases access to clean needles and decreases needle sharing.¹

The decriminalization proposed in HB 173 would also reduce unnecessary arrests and incarcerations associated with possession of drug paraphernalia, which disproportionately affect communities of color. Reducing fear of interaction with law enforcement also has potential to increase access and utilization of treatment services.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of County Health Officers submits this letter of support for HB 173. For more information, please contact Ruth Maiorana, MACHO Executive Director at rmaiora1@jhu.edu or 410-937-1433. *This communication reflects the position of MACHO.*

¹ CDC: Office of the Associate Director for Policy and Strategy. (2016, August 5). Access to clean syringes. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved February 5, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hst/hi5/cleansyringes/index.html>

² Office of Infectious Disease and HIV/AIDS Policy (OIDP). (2021, July 9). Viral hepatitis in the United States: Data and Trends. HHS.gov. Retrieved February 5, 2022, from <https://www.hhs.gov/hepatitis/learn-about-viral-hepatitis/data-and-trends/index.html>