

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF BILL HB0173 - FAVORABLE
Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and
members of the Judiciary Committee

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Feb 7, 2023

Last year this committee courageously voted in favor of this bill, and I respectfully urge it to do so again this year. I believe this bill has a substantial capacity to improve public health and reduce suffering in Maryland.

Possession of drug paraphernalia is not the same as possession of illegal substances. Yet in Maryland, penalties for possessing paraphernalia can sometimes exceed the penalties for possessing the drugs themselves. This is excessive punishment for what should be treated as a public health issue. Possession of paraphernalia should be decriminalized.

Previous testimony has highlighted numerous benefits this bill will provide. Currently, needle users are more likely to share needles and syringes. This keeps the number of illegal accessories to a minimum. But this is highly unsanitary and increases the spread of disease, including HIV. If this bill were passed, it would be legal for each person to use clean, fresh supplies. This bill may also reduce the amount of littering of drug paraphernalia. Because paraphernalia is illegal, it is often discarded in the same place it is used. Not only is this unsightly, but it can cause accidental needle sticks to others.

This bill also provides benefits for the users of illegal substances. Long jail sentences prevent people from getting the help they need. The effects of incarceration are psychologically ruinous; moreover, the state is paying exorbitant costs to house all these offenders whose only crime was possession of paraphernalia. Decriminalization will remove barriers for people who wish to enter treatment programs or similar.

I strongly urge the committee to issue a favorable report for HB0173. Thank you.