

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 and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Liz Bement and I am a resident of District 46, and have lived in Fells Point for 8 years. I am writing to ask you to support HB173.

I first became an advocate for harm reduction measures after the death of my 27-year-old son, Alex, in May 2019. He struggled with opioid addiction starting in college at the University of Pennsylvania where he was a member of their division I lacrosse team. He attended several treatment programs and was doing well. But after 2 ½ years in recovery, he had a relapse, and because the drug he took was tainted with deadly Fentanyl, that relapse cost him his life. After experiencing that profound loss, I began to recognize the role harm reduction could have played in saving him, and what role it can play in saving other lives moving forward.

Right now in Maryland, we have an incredibly harmful drug policy that criminalizes and stigmatizes people who use drugs; we have mediocre treatment options; and a tainted deadly drug supply.

Since the 1970s, the drug war has led to unprecedented levels of incarceration and the marginalization of tens of millions of Americans – while failing to reduce problematic drug use and its related harms. Criminalizing the distribution of drug paraphernalia leads to people sharing and re-using syringes, which can spread bloodborne diseases like HIV and hepatitis and cause endocarditis and other deadly infections. By continuing to criminalize the distribution of clean supplies for people who suffer from addiction, we are saying their lives and well-being do not matter—that they are “less than” and their disease is “less than.”

This is in stark contrast to the compassion with which other diseases are treated, like cancer or diabetes. We need a more compassionate approach to those who suffer from the disease of addiction so that they can stay alive long enough to choose recovery. Many of those suffering from addiction eventually recover—but that won't happen if they die first. That is why harm reduction legislation is critically important.

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

Best Regards,

Liz Bement