

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB706:

Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization

TO: Delegate Jon Cardin, Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee members

FROM: Elizabeth Spradley, RN BSN

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Good afternoon Delegate Cardin, Chair, and Committee members,

My name is Elizabeth, I am a nurse working and living in Baltimore City for the past 13 years. I am currently working for MDH's Center for Harm Reduction Services (CHRS) as well as University of Maryland's community psychiatry team. At MDH CHRS, I am addressing the huge gap in services for people who use drugs and have drug-related wounds including the large increase in wounds from xylazine in the drug supply. Decriminalizing drug paraphernalia would remove some barriers to care for this population.

However, in every setting I have provided care, I have worked with people who use drugs. In every setting I have provided care, stigma and misunderstanding around drug use and ways to reduce the harm of drug use is deeply embedded, and that stigma continues to be life-threatening and life-taking. That is why I am writing to you all to support HB 706 to decriminalize drug paraphernalia. Decriminalizing these tools is critical. The passing of this bill will give law enforcement and the general public the clear guidance needed around drug paraphernalia. We need clear guidance for the people using drug paraphernalia and for the spaces servicing people using the drug paraphernalia.

And speaking to what I know best, healthcare needs clear guidance that these tools are not a reason to deny someone healthcare services or force them into drug treatment or take away their children or make assumptions that people who use drugs don't care about their health.

As a nurse, I want people to know about drug paraphernalia and the benefits of each piece. I want people to be in awe of how such small items can a huge difference in public health issues like mitigating the spread of infectious diseases. I want people to know how these tools are a bridge to other necessary services like mental health, primary care, and speciality care. I want people to use these tools with pride knowing they are choosing a safer path to drug use.

To continue to criminalize drug paraphernalia inhibits me from being able to provide quality care to every Marylander. I encourage you all to please support HB706 to decriminalize drug paraphernalia in Maryland.

Thank you for your time, Elizabeth Spradley RN BSN