

Written Testimony by Liz Bement
HB 706 - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization
Before the House Judiciary Committee--February 13, 2024
FAVORABLE

Chairman Clippinger and the Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am in favor of decriminalizing the possession of drug paraphernalia.

I believe the current practice of restricting resources from this vulnerable population and isolating and criminalizing them has failed. Drug addiction is a medical condition and incarcerating individuals is not treatment.

We need a new more humane approach—one with interventions that focus on health and safety. Even though overdose fatalities have quadrupled in the last decade, we have inexplicably failed to develop comprehensive drug policy reform—It is just common sense that Maryland begins to treat addiction as a public health issue.

There is also an increase in intravenous drug use, and syringe programs are crucial in reducing harm. Syringe access programs are well-researched and there is scientific consensus that they save lives and stop the spread of infectious disease, and they are inexpensive and do not encourage drug use. Although Maryland passed legislation authorizing statewide syringe programs, access to these programs is difficult in many jurisdictions, so people in many areas are rightfully fearful of criminal charges, and arrests and incarceration should not trump health care and wellness for people who are suffering from substance use disorder. Bill HB 706 will also assist with proven public health practices such as needle exchange programs that reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis B.

To tackle the public health crises before us, we have to find ways to shed the stigma and prioritize proven health-based solutions, to improve the chances of recovery from addiction. It's beyond time for our state to take the step to decriminalize paraphernalia.

Sincerely,

Liz Bement

Baltimore, MD