

January 27, 2025

The Honorable William C. (Will) Smith, JR., Esq.  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Wing  
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: SUPPORT of Senate Bill 370 (Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization) - FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Clippinger and House Judiciary Committee Members,

Representing myself, Erin Russell, a decade-long Maryland resident and nationally recognized harm reduction expert, I write to state my support for Senate Bill 370 (Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization) which will revise existing criminal law to remove items that could be used to consume drugs from what is considered drug paraphernalia, effectively decriminalizing possession of those items.

I have worked in the field at community-based harm reduction programs and as a public servant at the Maryland Department of Health, where I helped implement the state's naloxone distribution and syringe services programs. The national decrease in overdose deaths has not been seen equally across all populations, and we must remain vigilant of this urgent public health issue. This bill will reduce overdose deaths by:

1. **Reducing interaction with law enforcement and the criminal justice system** will reduce deaths because **the risk of death is 10-fold higher among adults released from prison relative to the general population**. Reducing arrests for paraphernalia will save money and time and eliminate the chance that someone will overdose upon release from jail.
2. **Expanding syringe service programs will increase touchpoints with people at highest risk of overdose**, connecting them to needed behavioral health care. This bill will be a boon to syringe service programs, which engage tens of thousands of people each year across Maryland. These programs are hubs of care, and directly connect people to the most effective means of preventing overdose – medications for opioid use disorder treatment and naloxone.

Decriminalizing paraphernalia is an effective policy intervention. It has macro-level implications, which we have seen be incredibly effective at reducing population-level health concerns and death. As written, I believe that this bill will simplify Maryland's paraphernalia laws and clarify that possession of harm reduction supplies to prevent infectious disease is not a crime. **I ask that the Senate Judiciary Committee give SB370 a favorable report.**

For more information or with any questions please contact me at [erinhaas88@gmail.com](mailto:erinhaas88@gmail.com).

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'ER', followed by a horizontal line.

Erin Russell, MPH