



BALTIMORE CITY

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House Judiciary Committee
February 11, 2025

House Bill 556 - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization Support

The Baltimore City Substance Abuse Directorate (Directorate), writes to express our support for HB 556 to decriminalize drug paraphernalia for administration. The Directorate is a member organization composed of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment programs located in Baltimore City. We strongly believe that this bill will improve health and save lives for our patients and others in the community struggling with substance use. We are proud that our Mayor, Brandon Scott, has made this policy a priority for passage this year.

Evidence has shown that criminalization of substance use disorders has not been effective at reducing use and related harms. Instead, has further marginalized a vulnerable population. Criminalizing drug paraphernalia encourages re-using and sharing syringes, which increases risk for infections like HIV and Hepatitis. Studies have shown that fear of being arrested is directly related to an increased likelihood of sharing syringes and other injection supplies.¹ Alternative approaches to criminalization have already proven successful.

Syringe services programs (SSPs), where people who use drugs can exchange used needles for new clean ones, were initially opposed under the impression that they would enable and encourage drug use. This has been refuted many times over. As the CDC reports, "Nearly 30 years of research has shown that comprehensive SSPs are safe, effective, and cost-saving, do not increase illegal drug use or crime, and play an important role in reducing the transmission of viral hepatitis, HIV and other infections, new users of SSPs are five times more likely to enter drug treatment and about three times more likely to stop using drugs than those who don't use the programs."²

As opioid overdoses are still too high in Maryland, it is critical to support evidence-based policies that can reduce harms related to drug use. Decriminalization of paraphernalia can increase engagement with and expansion of SSPs as well as encourage proper disposal of supplies. Research shows that this can reduce drug use, improve health and connect people to further treatment services. We care deeply about providing treatment for those who use drugs and every day witness the challenges this population experiences in their journey to recovery.

We hope to see Maryland continue taking steps to support harm reduction approaches and remove criminalization as a barrier to recovery. We ask that the Judicial Proceedings Committee give HB 556 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Ashley Archie, LCSW-C
President

1. Blumenthal, R.N., Collateral damage in the war on drugs: HIV risk behaviors among injection drug users. *International Journal of Drug Policy* 10 (1999) 25-38.
2. CDC (2023). Summary of Information on The Safety and Effectiveness of Syringe Services Programs (SSPs). <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/syringe-services-programs-summary.html>.