

February 11, 2025

The Honorable Chair Delegate Luke Clippinger
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
100-101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 556 - Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization)

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Clippinger and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Charlene and I live in Baltimore City. I am 58-years-old and a regular voter. I also use drugs and have been a participant of the Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) for almost 3 years. I am writing today in **support** of House Bill (HB) 556 - Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration – Decriminalization.

I pick up harm reduction supplies from BHRC almost every week. And almost every week I return used syringes (usually hundreds at a time) for safe disposal. I was stuck with a syringe as a child in the 70s. I was lucky - I didn't catch any diseases like HIV or hepatitis C. But someone else's child may not be so lucky. As a user, it's imperative to get syringes off the streets, especially used syringes.

Even as a 'protected' participant of a syringe service program (SSP), I'm still a little concerned about being stopped or arrested for carrying syringes with me. I'm very careful to stay away from places that would be problematic, places where I'm more likely to get stopped - certain stores, or areas, or where there's more police. When I *have* to go to those areas, I don't bring syringes or what I need with me. I know other people who are concerned and they do the same thing - they're limited and isolated in where they can go in the city. I also know people who are harassed and checked on by police on a regular basis. They don't carry 'new ones' (sterile syringes) on them and risk not having one when they most need it.

I learned about safe syringe practices mainly from my husband and other loved ones. We always use sterile syringes, or sterilize and sanitize them if we absolutely have to reuse them. But I've seen people pick up used syringes off of the ground when they don't have one. They know the risks - that they could get HIV or hep C - but they're too scared to pick up sterile harm reduction supplies. These were young people too, in their 20s and 30s.

The decriminalization of paraphernalia wouldn't mean that you would use drugs anywhere, but that you could bring syringes anywhere without worry. When people ask me for a sterile syringe,

I would be able to give it to them anywhere and they wouldn't need to reuse any. And then I could tell them about places like BHRC and other SSPs where they could get support. It would make things safer - less hep C and HIV. It would also make returning used syringes a lot better and easier. Fear of being stopped is a big reason why people don't return their syringes - they don't want to get caught with them.

I believe that this bill will make Maryland a safer and healthier place for *everyone* - both people who use and those who don't.

I ask that the House Judiciary Committee give HB 556 a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Charlene