

STATEMENT OF
ERIC E. STERLING, J.D.¹
SUBMITTED TO
THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
HON. LUKE CLIPPINGER, CHAIR
HON. J. SANDY BARTLETT, VICE CHAIR
FEBRUARY 11, 2025

**IN SUPPORT OF
HB 556
DECRIMINALIZATION OF PARAPHERNALIA**

Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and Honorable Delegates, thank you for reading my brief statement.

I strongly support of HB 556 because it will help save lives.

I heartily commend Delegate Simpson for sponsoring HB556 because changing the law to protect the lives of persons with substance abuse disorders remains so profoundly hard. Even in 2025, too many people do not see the humanity of persons who have been stigmatized as “drug addicts” or “junkies” for so long.

This bill will decriminalize sterile equipment that is used to ingest drugs and thus substantially reduce the risk of infection from HIV and hepatitis.

Not only will enabling persons with substance use disorders to possess this sterile equipment without the fear of arrest and prosecution (saving the costs of unnecessary criminal justice processing), this bill, if enacted, will reduce public expenditures for health care by reducing the number of persons who suffer from these diseases.

The legal availability of sterile injection equipment does not encourage people to continue patterns of addiction.

I urge a favorable report.

¹ Eric E. Sterling has lived in Maryland 33 years and in the 18th legislative district over 27 years. From 1979 to 1989 he was Assistant Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary where he was responsible for federal drug laws, among many other matters. He was Executive Director of the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation (1989-2020). In Montgomery County, he served on the Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Advisory Council from 2010 to 2020, including three years as chair. Recently has served on the Advisory Commission on Policing of Montgomery County (2020-2024, Chair 2022-2024).