

February 7th, 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,

I, Elizabeth Spradley, support House Bill 556 Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration – Decriminalization. This bill will amend existing criminal law to remove certain items that could be used to consume drugs from what is considered “drug paraphernalia,” effectively decriminalizing possession of those items.

I am a nurse working in Baltimore City for the last 14 years providing care for people who use drugs. For the last two years, I have been at MDH Office of Harm Reduction working with our amazing harm reduction programs across the state including our syringe service programs (SSPs) where these supplies in question are distributed to those who need them. The operation and utilization of SSPs is invaluable to many people, including healthcare providers like myself. We learn crucial information about the unregulated drug supply and emerging trends from these spaces that informs care inside treatment centers, clinics, emergency departments, and hospitals.

The goal for people who use drugs is to feel safe accessing basic health services and available treatment options. Criminalizing these supplies is disruptive and fear-inducing to those who are attempting to access those basic services and use the safest, evidence-based techniques available. The current Maryland SSP statute has mixed interpretations by state authorities leading to vague and splintered discussions on its efficacy, decriminalizing drug paraphernalia will strengthen the SSP statute by allowing for clearer guidance to those enforcing laws and clearer protections for those providing and using these supplies.

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 House Judiciary Committee give HB 556 a favorable report.

For more information about my position, please contact Elizabeth Spradley at elizabeth.spradley@som.umaryland.edu.

Thank you for your time, Elizabeth Spradley RN BSN