



**House Judiciary Committee
February 11, 2025**

**House Bill 556 - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization
Support**

NCADD-Maryland supports House Bill 556. The General Assembly saw fit to pass this bill in 2021. Then-Governor Hogan used flawed reasoning to veto that measure. Harm reduction strategies do not encourage drug use. There is decades of research and experience right here in Maryland that prove that thinking is simply wrong.

This bill decriminalizes items that can be used to inject, ingest, inhale, or otherwise consume a controlled dangerous substance. As Maryland continues to consider and implement programs and strategies that reduce the harms caused by substance use, the decriminalization of paraphernalia will continue to help ensure that people are accessing services such as syringe services programs and avoid arrest and incarceration.

The benefits of decriminalization include:

- Improved treatment outcomes when someone with a substance use disorder is ready to enter treatment;
- Greater incentive to seek treatment as people who are using substances are less afraid of law enforcement interaction;
- A reduction in the racial disparities in the criminal justice system, as Maryland is among the worst states in its proportion of people of color who are incarcerated;
- A reduction in the collateral damage caused by incarceration; and
- Improvement in the impact of limited public health resources.

In decriminalizing paraphernalia, we will reduce the need for people to re-use certain items that may contribute to the transmission of infectious diseases. This will have a positive public health impact on the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C, and save money in the reduction of needed health services.

We know the collateral damage caused by the war on drugs continues to harm people in Maryland, and disproportionately people of color. As this committee has heard repeatedly over the years, people with criminal records are too often denied employment, housing, food stamps, and scholarships, without any due consideration of the details involved in the records.

We urge this Committee give a favorable report to House Bill 556.