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House Judiciary Committee

February 11, 2025

House Bill 556 – *Criminal Law – Drug Paraphernalia for Administration – Decriminalization*

**POSTION: SUPPORT**

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), the largest physician organization in Maryland, supports House Bill 556.

House Bill 556 would decriminalize possession of items that can be used to inject, ingest, inhale, or otherwise consume a controlled dangerous substance. Reducing the harm caused by substance use has been a priority of the General Assembly. The decriminalization of paraphernalia proposed by this legislation will continue to help ensure that people are accessing services, such as syringe service programs, and will avoid unnecessary arrest and incarceration. Decriminalization will provide greater incentive to seek treatment as people who are using substances will be less afraid of law enforcement interaction. In decriminalizing paraphernalia, the State will also 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. Further, the collateral damage of unnecessary incarceration continues to harm people in Maryland, and disproportionately people of color. Passage of House Bill 556 will demonstrate a commitment to reframing substance use as a public health issue, not a criminal issue. A favorable report is requested.

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