
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 327

Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions - Repeal

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 5, 2026

Social Work Advocates for Social Change supports SB 327, which would eliminate criminal penalties for the possession of paraphernalia used in the consumption of illicit substances. SWASC strongly urges a favorable report on SB 327 as it is a crucial step to shift Maryland's approach to substance use toward public health.

Harm reduction strategies save lives, and criminalizing paraphernalia undermines these successes. Programs that provide safe syringes have been shown to reduce the transmission of these diseases drastically.¹ These health benefits can only be fully realized if individuals trust that they will not be penalized for seeking out and possessing safer supplies. Syringes can be purchased legally at a pharmacy without a prescription; however, these *become* illegal when associated with suspected drugs, even if no drugs are present. Legal items should remain legal. Decriminalizing paraphernalia would allow individuals to focus on their health and safety rather than worrying about criminal charges for possessing everyday objects.

SB 327 benefits not only the people who use paraphernalia to consume drugs, but also the communities in which they live. Many people who use drugs may avoid keeping used syringes or other paraphernalia due to fear that law enforcement will use those items as evidence of drug use, leading to potential arrest.² This fear can lead to improper disposal, which increases public health risks and environmental hazards. Decriminalizing paraphernalia possession ensures individuals have the time and space to safely dispose of used supplies. Fewer improperly discarded syringes ultimately can mean safer sidewalks, parks, and public spaces for families and businesses across Maryland.

Fully eliminating criminal penalties for paraphernalia is a critical step in challenging the stigma that surrounds substance use. By clarifying that the possession of harm reduction supplies is not a crime, this bill helps to shift the narrative around drug use – from one of criminality and punishment to one of care and support. This is not just a public health benefit: it is a social justice issue. Decriminalizing paraphernalia will help to ensure that people who use drugs are treated with dignity and respect, rather than being further marginalized by a legal system that punishes them for trying to survive.

Maryland is falling behind other states by continuing to criminalize paraphernalia. Maryland's laws are harmful and outdated, as 20 other states have decriminalized syringe possession for personal use.³ Criminalizing paraphernalia incentivizes unsafe behaviors



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that harm people who use drugs, first responders, business owners, families, and neighborhoods. Ending all paraphernalia penalties is a proven, cost-free way to improve health and public safety statewide.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 327.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

¹ CDC, *Syringe Service Programs (SSPs)*, 2025. Available at <https://restoredcdc.org/www.cdc.gov/syringe-services-programs/php/index.html>

² Tookes, Hansel E et al. "A comparison of syringe disposal practices among injection drug users in a city with versus a city without needle and syringe programs." *Drug and alcohol dependence* vol. 123,1-3 (2012): 255-9. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2011.12.001

³ Public Health Law Network, Harm Reduction Legal Project (2025).

<https://www.networkforphl.org/resources/topics/projects/harm-reduction-legal-project/>