



**Maryland Alliance for
Sensible Drug Policy**
LIVED EXPERIENCE. REAL SOLUTIONS.

February 6, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
101 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB551, Criminal Law – Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia
Prohibitions – Repeal (FAVORABLE)**

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the committee:

I'm submitting this testimony in **strong support of HB551** on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Sensible Drug Policy, a state-wide member-based advocacy group lead by people with lived or living experience with substance use.

Lived experience shows paraphernalia prohibitions cause harm

For many Marylanders, paraphernalia prohibitions mean they reuse, share, or throw supplies away in unsafe places. The results are predictable: more infections, more injuries, more fear of seeking help, and more harms that spill into the community. We asked our members to share their personal experiences and a few themes emerged:

- **Criminalization pushes people to reuse or share supplies even when they know the risks.**

"During COVID it felt seemingly impossible to find clean syringes/supplies. Because I was in the thick of my addiction, I was going to use substances, regardless of the supplies that were available. The only option on one particular evening, was to use a dull needle that belonged to someone that was diagnosed with Hep-C. I knew that this person Hep-C, and I knew that this needle was dull, and yet I put it into my body regardless. I still have permanent nerve damage to this day because of that experience, due to digging around in my arm with a dull needle."

– Person in recovery and Overdose Prevention Coordinator in Montgomery County.

- **Paraphernalia stigma does not stay neatly confined to drug use.**

"The police were rude, they did not even treat me as a human. I am diabetic and at that time I was using insulin with syringes. I have never been an IV drug user, so the thought of being interrogated about them was never on my mind. I felt humiliated."

– Person in Recovery and Certified Community Health Worker in Talbot County

- **People avoid health care and treatment when carrying supplies feels legally risky.**

“I desperately needed medical attention, but I did not want to go to a clinic because I was afraid of getting caught with my paraphernalia; even if it meant that I was going to receive help for my condition.”

– Person in Recovery and Behavioral Health Service Specialist in Baltimore City

- **People dispose of supplies unsafely when they think they might be searched.**

“I was always afraid about being stopped with paraphernalia on me. I would toss it at the first hint of trouble, often in parks or alleys, even along the sidewalk, where anyone – including children – could have found it. I still think about that possibility years later.”

– Person in recovery living in Baltimore County

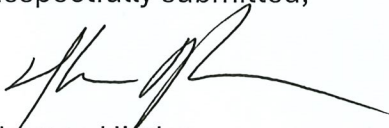
This is what HB551 can change. Not by pretending drug use is risk-free. But by removing a criminal penalty that reliably makes drug use more dangerous for the individuals and the public.

The research aligns with our lived experience

The lived experience of our members aligns with research, which shows that criminalizing paraphernalia creates a predictable chain reaction: people avoid carrying sterile supplies because they’re afraid of being arrested, which makes reuse and sharing more likely and increases the risk of HIV and hepatitis transmission.ⁱ Those same legal barriers can also make syringe services programs less effective.ⁱⁱ Repealing paraphernalia prohibitions helps reverse those harms by making it safer and simpler for people to carry and obtain personal-use supplies and for programs to distribute them without legal gray areas.ⁱⁱⁱ

For these reasons, the Maryland Alliance for Sensible Drug Policy respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE report on HB551**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Thomas Higdon
Executive Director
Maryland Alliance for Sensible Drug Policy

ⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Access to clean syringes. Health Impact in 5 Years (HI-5). Retrieved February 3, 2026, available at https://archive.cdc.gov/www_cdc_gov/policy/hi5/cleansyringes/index.html; Davis, C. S., Carr, D. H., & Samuels, E. A. (2019). Paraphernalia laws, criminalizing possession and distribution of items used to consume illicit drugs, and injection-related harm. *American Journal of Public Health*, 109(11), 1564–1567, available at <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305268>.

ⁱⁱ CDC (n.d.) supra; Fernández-Viña, M. H., Prood, N. E., Herpolsheimer, A., Waimberg, J., & Burris, S. (2020). State laws governing syringe services programs and participant syringe possession, 2014–2019. *Public Health Reports*, 135(1_suppl), 128S–137S, available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033354920921817>

ⁱⁱⁱ Davis, et al. (2019), supra; Fernández-Viña, et al. (2020), supra.