

February 6, 2026

The Honorable Sandy Bartlett
Chair, House Judiciary Committee
Taylor House Office Building, Room 100
6 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 551 (Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions - Repeal)

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and House Judiciary Committee Members

I am a professor and public health researcher at Johns Hopkins University, but this testimony is my individual perspective and does not represent my institution. I strongly support House Bill 551.

For over two decades, I have been working on programs that train people who use drugs to be peer educators to help prevent HIV and hepatitis C transmission, endocarditis, as well as drug overdoses in our communities. Many of our Maryland communities have been hit hard by these epidemics, causing terrible losses and pain to many families.

In our health programs, we train individuals not only to promote risk reduction among their network members and the community, but also to reduce the risk of community members encountering used syringes. We encourage participants not only to dispose of their own syringes and other drug paraphernalia but also to safely dispose of syringes that they find in the community. Unfortunately, this effort has been hampered by the ambiguity of current laws, which make some people afraid to possess used syringes.

Moreover, the current law can impede researchers and harm reduction professionals from collecting drug use paraphernalia to test for the presence of highly dangerous adulterants in the drug supply. This information can be life-saving.

I believe this bill will simplify Maryland's criminal law, improve our state's response to infectious diseases and overdose prevention, and keep legally obtained materials legal. I urge the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee support House Bill 551.

For more information about my position, please contact me at clatkin2000@gmail.com

Sincerely,



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