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February 4, 2026

Bill Ferguson, Esq.
President of Senate
State House, H-107
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Hello Senate President Ferguson,

My name is Melinda and I am a constituent from Baltimore, a registered voter, and a nursing student at Johns Hopkins University. I am writing today to express my support for HB551 / SB327 (Criminal Law – Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions – Repeal). I believe this bill will be beneficial to the state of Maryland as a whole and particularly impactful for members of our community that are often underserved.

I have a passion for public and community health that has only grown since I began my clinical experience at SPARC, an organization in Baltimore that focuses on harm reduction for the community. In working with the amazing staff there, I have learned about how harm reduction efforts have been beneficial to the community. Paraphernalia laws have become very outdated, with the Model Drug Paraphernalia Act being created in the late 70s and still influencing state policies today. We now know that harm reduction and removing drug paraphernalia laws helps reduce the transmission of diseases such as HIV or hepatitis, decreases syringe litter in communities, and helps with reducing stigma, which can make individuals more likely to seek out safe alternatives while experiencing opioid use disorder and possibly be more comfortable in seeking treatment options should they decide they wish to quit.

I have spoken to several people that are at risk of being arrested simply for possessing syringes. These people are often trying to get back on their feet while struggling with their disease. The risk of ending up with criminal charges for simple possession of items that are often commonplace just because they are being used for drugs is a barrier that these individuals do not need. I have personally known several addicts and have learned that compassion is a key to supporting them and allowing them a safe place should they feel ready to work towards healing from their chronic health conditions.

I urge you to consider this bill a priority and consider the benefits for the community, city, and state as a whole. I appreciate your time and consideration for this important issue. You can reach me at 407-250-0250 or mshurtl1@jh.edu if you would like to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,
Melinda Shurtleff
Melinda Shurtleff
MSN Candidate, August, 2026