

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

February 6, 2026

RE: SUPPORT of House Bill 551

(Criminal Law – Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions – Repeal) – FAVORABLE

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

My name is Katie Rodriguez, LCSW-C, and I strongly support House Bill 551 (Criminal Law – Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions – Repeal), which would end all penalties for drug paraphernalia. This is a common-sense, evidence-based bill that prioritizes the health and safety of all Marylanders.

I am a Baltimore resident and a licensed mental health clinician who works with individuals and families navigating substance use, mental health, and recovery. I am also the former Director of a syringe service program. I have had the honor of supporting people by providing access to sterile supplies. These supports can be as tangible as reducing skin tissue damage by preventing syringe reuse and as emotional as preserving dignity through non-judgmental pathways to care. In both my professional and personal life, I have seen how punitive approaches to drug use create barriers to care rather than pathways to safety.

Ending penalties for drug paraphernalia would directly support harm reduction efforts (repeatedly demonstrated to be evidence-based and effective), reduce preventable infectious disease transmission, and lower overdose risk by allowing people to use safer, legally obtained supplies without fear of arrest. Criminalizing paraphernalia discourages individuals from seeking help and disproportionately impacts already marginalized communities, while doing little to improve public safety. Policies that prioritize health over punishment enable people to build relationships and survive, thereby allowing them to access treatment, stability, and recovery.

I believe this bill will simplify Maryland's criminal law, strengthen our state's infectious disease and overdose prevention response, and ensure that legally obtained items remain legal. I respectfully urge the House Judiciary Committee to give HB 551 a favorable report.

For more information about this position, I can be contacted at admin@gmspaces.com.

Sincerely,



Katie Rodriguez, LCSW-C
Baltimore, Maryland