

February 6, 2026

The Honorable Sandy Bartlett
Chairwoman, 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) -
FAVORABLE**

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

My name is Gerardo Benavides and I am the Board Chair of the Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC), and I strongly support House Bill 551 (Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions - Repeal) which will end all penalties for drug paraphernalia. This is a common-sense, evidence-based bill that prioritizes the health and safety of all Marylanders.

BHRC's mission is to mobilize communities in Baltimore City, and across the state of Maryland, for the health, dignity, and safety of people who use drugs, and have been targeted by harmful policies in the past. Our staff work tirelessly and directly with communities by providing life-saving services and human-centered education to people who use drugs, and their allies. Criminalizing paraphernalia creates an unneeded barrier to services, and keeps our staff from making real, human connections to individuals who might otherwise connect with social services, health care, or recovery-based services. Additionally, criminalizing paraphernalia adds to people engaging in unsafe behaviors; this bill would prioritize the safety and dignity of all Marylanders. Simply put, criminalizing paraphernalia only seeks to punish people while providing no real solutions, further putting those who are already marginalized even further on the margins, and more susceptible to life-altering consequences.

I believe that this bill will simplify Maryland's criminal law, improve our state's infectious disease and overdose prevention response, and keep legally obtained items legal. This bill also takes a human-centered approach to harm reduction work. **I ask that the House Judiciary Committee give House Bill 551 a favorable report.**

For more information about this position, please contact me at gbenavi17@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Gerardo Benavides
Columbia, MD, Howard County