

EZRA MACLEOD TOWNE

Testimony Favorable to HB0551: Criminal Law - Drug Paraphenalia and Controlled Paraphenalia Prohibitions - Repeal

February 6, 2026

Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair, Delegate Debra Davis, Vice-Chair, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ezra Towne, and my pronouns are they/them. I am writing to you today because I **strongly support HB0551, and ask for a favorable report from the Judiciary committee.**

As a transgender and pre-diabetic person, I use syringes regularly to administer medicine necessary to maintain my health. These syringes are currently defined as both controlled and drug paraphenalia, and current Maryland law would subject me to arrest while carrying them to my local health clinic in order to properly dispose of them in exchange for new syringes. This is simply unacceptable.

At the point of potential arrest, officers would be unable to distinguish what my hypodermic syringes and needles are used for. I can legally pick up my syringes and needles at a pharmacy for injecting the medication needed to keep me healthy. What is the point of criminalizing things that can be legally obtained at a pharmacy, even without a prescription?

Maryland is falling behind other states in this matter: 20 states have decriminalized syringe possession for personal use.¹

In addition, harm reduction advocates and scientists have proven that access to sterile syringes in needle exchange programs does not increase illicit drug use - even if an individual may be using them to inject controlled substances.²

Decriminalization means that drug users are less likely to share needles and spread HIV and Hepatitis C, and other blood borne diseases. Risky behavior increases when possession of these items are criminalized.³ Additionally, when drug users feel safe disposing of used syringes and needles, they also gain access to critical services and drug use prevention resources. Drug users are 5x more likely to enter treatment and 3x more likely to stop using drugs when they have access to such resources.⁴

For these reasons, I ask for a favorable report on HB0551 - Criminal Law - Drug Paraphenalia and Controlled Paraphenalia Prohibitions - Repeal.

Sincerely,
Ezra MacLeod Towne
Wheaton, D18

¹Public Health Law Network, Harm Reduction Legal Project (2025)

² Marx, M A et al. "Trends in crime and the introduction of a needle exchange program." *American journal of public health* vol. 90,12 (2000): 1933-6. doi:10.2105/ajph.90.12.1933

³U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, *Effectiveness of Syringe Service Programs*, 2023. Available at <https://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/publications/esp/syringeservice.cfm>

⁴Davis, Corey S et al. "Paraphernalia Laws, Criminalizing Possession and Distribution of Items Used to Consume Illicit Drugs, and Injection-Related Harm." *American journal of public health* vol. 109,11 (2019): 1564-1567. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2019.30526