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## **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 551**

### **Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia and Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions - Repeal**

#### *House Judiciary Committee*

**February 10, 2026**

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change supports SB 327**, which would eliminate criminal penalties for the possession of paraphernalia related to illicit substances. SWASC strongly urges a favorable report on SB 327 as it is a crucial step to shift Maryland's approach to saving lives.

**Eliminating criminal penalties for paraphernalia possession saves lives because clean supplies limit the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C.**<sup>1</sup> Syringes can be purchased legally at a pharmacy without a prescription; however, these become illegal when associated with suspected drugs, even if no drugs are present. *Legal items should remain legal.* If individuals can legally carry the safe supplies that they have legally purchased, they can focus on their health and safety rather than worrying about criminal charges for possessing everyday objects.

**SB 327 benefits not only the people who are at risk for contracting HIV or Hepatitis C, but also the broader community.** People may avoid keeping used syringes or other paraphernalia due to fear that law enforcement will use those items as evidence of drug use, leading to potential arrest.<sup>2</sup> This fear can lead to improper disposal, which increases public health risks and environmental hazards. SB 327 ensures individuals have the time and space to safely dispose of used supplies. Fewer improperly discarded syringes ultimately can mean safer sidewalks, parks, and public spaces for families and businesses across Maryland.

**The ability to legally carry safe supplies does not promote drug consumption, as research consistently shows that availability of clean needles is not associated with increased drug use.**<sup>3</sup> By clarifying that the possession of sterile supplies is not a crime, this bill helps to shift the narrative around drug use – from one of criminality and punishment to one of care and support. This is not just a public health benefit: it is a social justice issue. Decriminalizing paraphernalia will help to ensure that people are treated with dignity and respect, rather than being further marginalized by a legal system that punishes them for trying to survive.

**Maryland is falling behind other states by continuing to criminalize paraphernalia.** Maryland's laws are harmful and outdated, as other states have passed paraphernalia repeal laws years ago.<sup>4</sup> Harms from criminalizing paraphernalia extend to strains, including financial, on first responders, business owners, families, and neighborhoods. Ending all paraphernalia penalties is a proven, cost-free way to improve health and public safety statewide.

**Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report on SB 327.**



For more information, please contact

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*Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.*

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<sup>1</sup> (2025). HCV Prevention. *International Association of Providers of AIDS Care*. <https://www.iapac.org/fact-sheet/hcv-prevention/>

<sup>2</sup> Tookes, Hansel E et al. (2012). "A comparison of syringe disposal practices among injection drug users in a city with versus a city without needle and syringe programs." *Drug and alcohol dependence* vol. 123,1-3 (2012): 255-9.  
doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2011.12.001

<sup>3</sup> (n.d.) What The Research Shows Regarding Syringe Exchange Programs. *Drug Policy Facts*.  
<https://www.drugpolicyfacts.org/node/934>

<sup>4</sup> (2023). Repeal of Paraphernalia Laws: Minnesota Leads the Way. *The Network for Public Health Law*.  
<https://www.networkforphl.org/news-insights/repeal-of-paraphernalia-laws-minnesota-leads-the-way/>