

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,

I, Abigail Winiker, PhD, am writing to express my explicit support for Senate Bill 327 (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.

By way of introduction, I am currently an Assistant Scientist in the Department of Health, Policy and Management at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, where I also completed a Masters of Science and a Doctoral degree. I also serve as the Program Director for the Bloomberg Overdose Prevention Initiative, where I work to promote the adoption of evidence-based policies to support the health of people who use drugs and/or are living with a substance use disorder. I also create and implement guidance on evidence-based state and local level opioid settlement fund spending.

Extensive public health research supports the effectiveness of ending paraphernalia penalties on health and community-level outcomes. Paraphernalia decriminalization policies are associated with *less* public syringe litter, leading to cleaner, safer communities. Further, the criminalization of paraphernalia is shown to deter people who use drugs from the use of syringe service programs and can more broadly limit the implementation of such programs in community settings. Syringe exchange programs are unequivocally associated with reductions in infectious disease transmission and risky behaviors linked to overdose risk.

Additionally, ending paraphernalia penalties would undoubtedly increase the potential for Maryland's valuable opioid settlement funds to support and expand life-saving interventions. Decision-makers are encouraged to invest these funds towards evidence-based programs such as syringe exchange and drug testing programming, yet existing paraphernalia laws may disincentive settlement allocations due to fears of legal ambiguity that put programs, staff, and participants at risk. For these dollars to have the biggest impact, it's critical that the interventions proven to save life, reduce healthcare costs, and increase access to treatment and recovery are accessible and confidently funded.

I deeply 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. **I ask that the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee give Senate Bill 327 a favorable report.**

For more information about this position, please contact Abigail Winiker at awinike1@jhu.edu. Please note that the views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Johns Hopkins University or the Johns Hopkins Health System.

Sincerely,

Abigail Winiker, PhD, MSPH

Baltimore City, Maryland