

**House Bill 551 Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia and  
Controlled Paraphernalia Prohibitions - Repeal**

Judiciary Committee

February 10, 2026

**Position: FAVORABLE**

The Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of House Bill 551.

HB 551 will repeal prohibitions related to drug paraphernalia, which will support public health initiatives and reduce the criminalization of drug users.

Initiatives like Maryland's [Syringe Services Program \(SSP\)](#) are key tools in efforts to reduce fatal overdoses across the state. SSPs connect people to sterile supplies, health care, and social services. They are proven to save lives, help those with substance use disorders get needed support, prevent overdose deaths, and reduce the impact of drug use on the community.

Unfortunately, Maryland's criminalization of drug paraphernalia deters participation in these life-saving services. Fear of arrest is a major barrier to broad uptake of SSPs among drug users. This criminalization leads people to share syringes rather than carry sterile supplies, which unnecessarily increases preventable disease transmission and death.

Maryland has taken steps in recent years to reduce fatal overdoses – and progress has been made – but we still lost over 1,300 friends and family members to an overdose in 2025.<sup>1</sup> Ending paraphernalia penalties is a proven, cost-free way to improve health and public safety. For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 551 and urges a favorable report.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://health.maryland.gov/dataoffice/Pages/mdh-dashboards.aspx>