

**House Bill 556 – Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization**

House Judiciary Committee

February 11, 2025

**Position: Favorable**

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 HB 556.

HB 566 will redefine “controlled” paraphernalia to support public health and reduce drug war tactics that target drug users. This bill will repeal existing portions of the law that criminalize possession of paraphernalia for personal use and reduce or eliminate the penalty for possession of paraphernalia for delivery or sale.

The public health and safety threat from drug-related intoxication continues to be a major concern. Maryland has made progress in recent years to address the epidemic, but we are still in the midst of a crisis that is devastating families across the state. From December 2023 – November 2024, 1,689 Marylanders lost their lives to an overdose.<sup>1</sup>

Harm reduction strategies like paraphernalia decriminalization can help. In fact, they are a key pillar in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' [Overdose Prevention Strategy](#). These strategies aim to treat substance use disorders as a public health issue and reduce negative consequences associated with drug use.

Providing drug users with sterile supplies saves lives. A major evaluation was done by the New York Academy of Medicine after the state allowed for the non-prescription sale of syringes in pharmacies,<sup>2</sup> and evaluators found no increases in improperly discarded syringes, accidental needle sticks among law enforcement or sanitation workers, criminal activity, or drug use.<sup>3</sup>

By addressing drug use as a public health issue rather than a criminal justice matter, HB 566 will save lives. For this reason, MHAMD supports this bill and urges a favorable report.

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

<sup>2</sup> <https://grantome.com/grant/NIH/R01-DA014219-01S1>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/consumers/prevention/needles\\_syringes/esap/overview.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/consumers/prevention/needles_syringes/esap/overview.htm)