



# PROGRESSIVE MARYLAND

P.O. Box 6988 Largo, MD 20792  
www.ProgressiveMaryland.org  
✉ Contact@ProgressiveMaryland.org  
f Facebook.com/ProgressiveMaryland  
t @Progressive\_MD

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## Testimony on Maryland House Bill 193: Criminal Law - Use or Possession of a Controlled Dangerous Substance - De Minimis Quantity

TO: Del. Clippinger, Chair, and members of the House Judiciary Committee  
FROM: Jennifer Dwyer, Director of Policy and Development, Progressive Maryland  
DATE: January 28, 2018  
POSITION: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on HB 193. Progressive Maryland is a grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. In addition, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong support for this bill.

Decriminalization is a major step toward reducing the health and social problems drugs cause in our communities. Folks who are struggling with drug use are often afraid to reach out for the help they need because they fear being arrested. Treating drug use through a public health lens will be a much more effective way of reducing drug use than treating it as a crime.

Decriminalization is also a step toward ending another injustice in our society-- the mass incarceration of people of color. As you are aware, criminal penalties for possession of small quantities of drugs are not applied evenly across races and communities, resulting in disproportionate numbers of Marylanders of color being locked up. Incarceration causes long-lasting economic and emotional harm for folks who are impacted as well as their families through loss of employment, inability to pay rent, mortgages, and other bills, and separation from children and loved ones.

Enacting HB 193 would have an overwhelmingly positive effect on the health and economic security of Maryland residents, and is a meaningful step toward equity for communities of color. We urge a favorable report.