

Senate Bill 420 (Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization)
FAVORABLE

Greetings Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee members,

Charm City Care Connection, based in E. Baltimore, is in support of Senate Bill 420 (Criminal Law - Drug Paraphernalia for Administration - Decriminalization).

Decriminalization is an evidence-based method that has proven successful across the world. In the US, Oregon is leading the way in implementing harm reduction practices, setting an example by centering the needs of individuals and communities impacted by substance use disorder and policing. Baltimore City has also led the way, in 1994 establishing the country's first syringe services programs (SSPs) which greatly improved public health by reducing rates of HIV infection among people who use drugs by over 75% in seventeen years¹. In 2016, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation that expanded SSPs statewide in order to distribute harm reduction supplies to prevent transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

Charm City Care Connection operates one such SSP, including offering street-based and mobile syringe services via our stellar outreach team. This is an issue that directly impacts the people we serve. Facing criminal charges and incarceration for possession of harm reduction items and medical supplies imparts greater trauma on people who have already experienced deep and consistent harm.

Amending existing criminal law to remove items that could be used to consume drugs from what is considered drug paraphernalia would effectively decriminalize possession of those items. We must keep in mind that this law is rooted in stigma. Many items on the paraphernalia list are those which are used by people with a variety of medical conditions including diabetes and depression. This law has disproportionately targeted black people, other people of color, and the poor, yet has done nothing to quell the opioid epidemic which has been killing our loved ones for decades.

We must begin decoupling policing from public health. Our loved ones need to trust that they can access supplies without law enforcement interference. When supplies are broadly considered illegal, even some registered SSP participants experience harassment and citation from law enforcement who do not understand the confusing patchwork of paraphernalia exceptions. Too many of the people we encounter have faced violence and harassment from law enforcement officers.

Harm reduction practices such as decriminalization, remove the harmful structures which allow the racist war on drugs to continue harming our communities in a multitude of ways. **We ask that the Judicial Proceedings Committee give SB420 a favorable report.**

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For more information about Charm City Care Connection or our position on this matter, please contact director@charmcityclinic.org. You can also reach me at the phone number or email provided below.

Thank you,

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