



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

March 20, 2024

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

RE: House Bill 253 – Cannabis Reform - Alterations – Letter of Support

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support for House Bill (HB) 253 – Cannabis Reform - Alterations. This bill updates and amends various sections of statute pertaining to adult-use cannabis legalization, including restrictions on cannabis advertising and marketing.

HB 253 updates critical provisions that the Maryland General Assembly passed to prevent youth cannabis use and protect public health. Cannabis advertising restrictions are key pillars of the Cannabis Reform Act passed in 2023. Under current Maryland law, cannabis businesses cannot advertise in certain print and social media channels unless at least 85 percent of the audience is over the age of 21 years old. However, event sponsorships were excluded from the disallowed forms of media, a loophole allowing cannabis businesses to sponsor events that include the presence of minors and those under 21 years of age.

The Department supports this important legislation to close the event sponsorship loophole. Youth exposed to cannabis advertising are more likely to use cannabis, which is a trend also readily apparent with youth alcohol and tobacco use.^{1,2,3} Cannabis businesses sponsoring events is cause for a public health concern, because comprehensive public health frameworks for adult-use cannabis should prioritize strategies that prevent youth cannabis initiation and use. These public health strategies include restrictions on event sponsorships and promotional events⁴ At least nine other states also restrict cannabis businesses from sponsoring or promoting certain events.⁵

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2017/17_0253.htm

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6980270/>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8864622/>

⁴ <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002131>

⁵ <https://www.networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/State-Regulation-of-Adult-Use-Cannabis-Advertising.pdf>

If you would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director of Governmental Affairs at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "LH Scott", is enclosed within a faint, light-blue outline of the state of Maryland.

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary