



Maryland State's Attorneys' Association

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DATE: **January 24, 2024**

BILL NUMBER: **HB 217**

POSITION: **Support**

The Maryland State's Attorney's Association (MSAA) supports HB 217.

HB 217 criminalizes the use of cannabis in the passenger area of motor vehicle while a child is present. This bill is a matter of protecting the most vulnerable among us – our children.

While our state's debate surrounding the contours of cannabis use and legalization continues, one fact remains indisputable: its effects on the developing brain can be profoundly detrimental. Studies have consistently linked early cannabis exposure to impaired cognitive function, increased risk of mental health issues, and even long-term structural changes in the brain.

In addition to normalizing substance use for the child that is present, an adult consuming cannabis in a vehicle may also expose that child to secondhand cannabis smoke. The danger of this conduct, though, is more proximate, and much more acute, if the adult intends to drive subsequent to, or is driving while, consuming cannabis – an adult under the influence of cannabis exhibits slower reaction times as well as impaired judgment and coordination. These deficits directly affect the adult's driving ability, jeopardizing themselves, their young passengers, and everyone else on the road.

The burden of protecting our children far outweighs any potential inconvenience faced by adult cannabis users – given the enclosed space of a vehicle, the vulnerability of a child passenger, and the plethora of other options available to adults wishing to consume cannabis, there is simply no reason for an adult to consume cannabis in a vehicle that is also occupied by a child. HB 217 in an important part of regulating the use of cannabis in our state and adds to the body of law safeguarding the right of our children to a safe and healthy environment.