

SEIU Local 500 - Testimony in Support of SB 54 202

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Testimony - SB 54, State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners - Grounds for
Disciplinary Action - Restrictions
Favorable
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 3, 2026
Christopher C. Cano, MPA
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairman Feldman & Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of public sector workers and professionals across Maryland, including licensed and credentialed employees who are subject to professional discipline boards and evolving regulatory frameworks. We support SB 54 because it provides clear, common-sense protections for licensed professionals in a state where cannabis is legal, while preserving professional standards and public safety.

SB 54 appropriately prohibits the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners from taking adverse disciplinary action against a licensee solely for discussing or recommending cannabis or cannabidiol products for potential therapeutic or health supplementation purposes. This narrow and carefully drafted protection ensures that veterinarians are not punished for engaging in good-faith, evidence-informed conversations with clients—conversations that reflect the legal reality of cannabis in Maryland.

More broadly, this bill reflects an important principle for workers and professionals across the state: legal conduct and lawful professional speech should not be grounds for discipline or job loss. In a state that has legalized cannabis for both medical and adult-use, workers should not be forced to navigate vague or outdated enforcement regimes that expose them to adverse employment actions simply for acknowledging or discussing legal products. SB 54 provides clarity, fairness, and due process—values that are essential to protecting workers' livelihoods.

Importantly, SB 54 does not weaken professional accountability. The Board retains full authority to discipline veterinarians for negligence, incompetence, or misconduct. The bill simply draws a necessary line between legitimate regulation and punitive enforcement disconnected from public policy and current law.

SEIU Local 500 believes this legislation sets an important precedent for protecting licensed professionals from unjust discipline while respecting the will of Maryland voters and lawmakers who have legalized cannabis. We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 54 and hope that the General Assembly will address the greater need for clear worker protections against adverse employment actions around cannabis use. Thank you to Senator Lam for leading on this important issue

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Christopher C. Cano, MPA
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs
SEIU Local 500

SB0054_MDVMA_FAV.pdf

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Maryland Veterinary Medical Association (MDVMA)

Established in 1886, MDVMA is a volunteer, non-profit organization comprised primarily of licensed Maryland Veterinarians.

SB0054 - State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners - Grounds for Disciplinary Action - Restrictions

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

January 30, 2026

MDVMA Position: SUPPORT

On behalf of the Maryland Veterinary Medical Association, we submit this supporting testimony of SB54 State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners – Grounds for Disciplinary Action – Restrictions.

We appreciate the effort of the sponsorship of this legislation to remove a layer of ambiguity which increases unnecessary risk for veterinary practitioners in our state. Veterinary practitioners who maintain and hold CDS and DEA licensure will still be subject to the laws and regulations pertaining to them but by removing the state mandates that bar discussion with their clientele, veterinarians in the state would be better able to educate clients and keep animals safe.

This text would technically authorize veterinarians within Maryland to recommend and prescribe these products and it is recognized this conflicts with official DEA/Federal provisions. However, we are not concerned with this apparent conflict because we do not believe it presents a substantive issue or risk to veterinary practitioners. With the adoption of this bill Maryland veterinarians would have no obligation to recommend or prescribe such products and if it becomes legal to do so under federal guidelines this law has removed the ambiguity that would exist for Maryland veterinarians if this language were not changed. Meanwhile this text addresses the issue of the Maryland Practice Act specifically providing sanctions against them simply for hosting a conversation in the exam room.

Pet owners are commonly requesting information about CBD derivatives for their pets and veterinarians have been in the cross-hairs of being largely unable to advise clients even on how to safely use the products they are already purchasing from over-the-counter sources. Many practitioners are uncomfortable having any conversation about these products because questions that arise in the conversation quickly become difficult to answer without enhanced professional liability. These products are readily available to the consuming public and with all supplements and medications there are inherent side effects, risks, benefits. Allowing practitioners to discuss and advise accordingly simply makes sense.

We support this effort that enhances the Veterinary Client Patient Relationship by allowing veterinarians to have conversations with clients without dictating to them what the conversation must be. This bill language supports the welfare of animals by ensuring veterinarians can be a part of the important conversations pertinent to their health when discussing CBD derivatives.

Respectfully Submitted,

Matthew Weeman DVM MS
Legislative Committee Chair & Board Member
Maryland Veterinary Medical Association

MARYLAND VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Support for SB 54

Uploaded by: Jacquie Cohen Roth

Position: FAV

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB0054 State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners – Grounds for Disciplinary Action – Restrictions

TO: The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair, Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

FROM: Jacquie Cohen Roth, MS

DATE: February 3, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 54, which would protect Maryland veterinarians from disciplinary action solely for discussing or recommending cannabis or cannabidiol (CBD) products for therapeutic purposes in animals. As a cannabis policy professional who has worked extensively with Maryland's legislative landscape and regulatory frameworks, I urge you to pass this commonsense legislation that will improve animal welfare, enhance the veterinarian-client relationship, and align Maryland law with the reality facing veterinary practitioners today.

I'm a cannabis industry professional with an MS in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics from the University of Maryland school of Pharmacy, MS Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics, where I have been an adjunct professor in the program since 2022. Through this work, I have developed a deep understanding of federal and state cannabis laws, the therapeutic applications of cannabinoids, and the regulatory gaps that currently create unnecessary barriers to patient care, including for our companion animals.

Currently, Maryland veterinarians face an impossible situation. Pet owners are increasingly interested in cannabis and CBD products for their animals, with surveys showing that nearly 30% of veterinarians receive weekly inquiries about these products from concerned pet parents. Yet under current law, veterinarians risk professional discipline - including license suspension or revocation, simply for discussing these products with clients.

This creates a particularly dangerous scenario: Well-meaning pet owners, who experienced relief from cannabis products for their own chronic pain or anxiety, may assume the same products are safe for their dogs. They don't understand that dogs have a uniquely high density of CB1 receptors that make them extraordinarily sensitive to THC toxicity. Without veterinary guidance, these loving pet owners may unknowingly poison their companions with products that are legal, readily available, and helpful for humans but potentially dangerous for animals.

The current regulatory framework exists despite the fact that:

1. Hemp-derived CBD is federally legal under the 2018 Farm Bill

2. Maryland has legalized adult-use cannabis and recognizes its therapeutic potential for humans
3. Pet owners are already using these products with or without veterinary guidance
4. Emerging research suggests therapeutic benefits for conditions like epilepsy, anxiety, pain, and inflammation in animals when appropriate products and dosages are used

This regulatory gap creates a dangerous dynamic where veterinarians who want to provide comprehensive care and evidence-based guidance to their clients are silenced by fear of professional consequences. Meanwhile, pet owners turn to unregulated products and unreliable internet sources, putting animal health at serious risk.

SB0054 is Critical for Animal Welfare

This bill is fundamentally about protecting animals through better veterinary care. When veterinarians cannot discuss cannabis or CBD products with clients, several harmful outcomes occur:

1. Animals Receive Substandard Care—And Face Real Danger Pet owners who are determined to use cannabis or CBD products for their animals will do so regardless of professional guidance. Without veterinary input, they may:

- Select inappropriate products or dosages
- Fail to recognize contraindications with other medications
- Miss opportunities for more effective treatments
- Unknowingly, expose animals to dangerous levels of THC

This last point deserves special emphasis. Many well-meaning pet owners assume that if a legal cannabis product helped their chronic pain, it might help their dog's arthritis or anxiety. What they don't understand is that dogs are uniquely vulnerable to THC toxicity. Dogs have a significantly higher density of CB1 receptors in their cerebellum compared to any other studied species, making them extraordinarily sensitive to THC.

When dogs receive excessive THC, whether through accidental ingestion or well-intentioned but inappropriate dosing—they develop severe clinical signs including:

- Static ataxia (distinctive wobbling stance, swaying, and difficulty maintaining balance)
- Urinary incontinence
- Severe lethargy or stuporous appearance
- Agitation and heart rate abnormalities
- Hypersalivation and hypothermia

While most dogs recover with supportive veterinary care, severe cases require hospitalization and IV fluid support. In rare instances, fatal secondary complications like aspiration pneumonia can occur when animals are too sedated to eat, drink, or protect their airways properly.

Veterinarians need to be able to have these conversations. They need to explain the critical difference between human-use cannabis products (which may contain significant THC) and appropriate CBD products for animals. They need to warn owners about THC toxicity risks and guide them toward safer alternatives. Currently, the threat of professional discipline silences these essential safety discussions.

2. Veterinarians Cannot Fulfill Their Duty of Care.

Veterinarians take an oath to use their scientific knowledge for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare. When they cannot discuss substances, their clients are using or considering, they cannot:

- Provide informed counseling based on available evidence
- Monitor for adverse effects or drug interactions
- Document product use in medical records
- Report adverse events to improve veterinary knowledge

3. The Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship is Compromised

Trust and open communication are essential to quality veterinary care. When veterinarians must avoid or deflect questions about cannabis and CBD, it undermines this relationship and may discourage pet owners from seeking professional guidance on other health matters.

The Solution: Protecting Professional Discretion

SB0054 takes a carefully crafted approach that protects veterinarians while maintaining appropriate oversight. The bill:

- Does NOT authorize veterinarians to prescribe or dispense cannabis products
- Does NOT require veterinarians to recommend these products
- Simply prevents disciplinary action solely for discussing or recommending cannabis or CBD for therapeutic purposes

This mirrors successful legislation in states like California (AB 1885) and Nevada (AB 101), which recognized that veterinarians need protection to have honest conversations with their clients about legal, widely available, and already used products.

Alignment with Maryland's Cannabis Policy Framework

Maryland has been a leader in cannabis reform, particularly in prioritizing patient access and evidence-based policy.

The legalization of adult-use cannabis (2023)

- Expanded medical cannabis access
- Home cultivation and production of cannabis products

- Reduced penalties for cannabis offenses

SB0054 extends this same principle of access, harm reduction, and professional discretion to veterinary medicine as Maryland healthcare providers for humans. It acknowledges that cannabis and CBD products are legitimate areas of inquiry and that veterinarians, as licensed medical professionals, should be able to provide guidance within their scope of practice.

The Reality of Current Practice

According to the Maryland Department of Agriculture's own 2019 CBD Oil Statement, the State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners recognizes that "many pet owners choose to administer these products to their pets regardless of legal status or veterinary advice." The Board urged veterinarians to "exhibit great caution" when discussing these products, a position that prioritizes regulatory compliance over animal welfare.

SB0054 corrects this imbalance by recognizing that the greater risk to animals comes from lack of professional guidance, not from veterinarians having informed discussions with their clients.

Addressing Concerns

Some may worry that this bill opens the door to inappropriate recommendations or reduces oversight. These concerns are unfounded:

1. **The bill maintains all existing veterinary standards of care.** Veterinarians remain subject to Board oversight for incompetence, negligence, or violations of professional standards.
2. **The bill only protects discussions and recommendations**—not prescribing, dispensing, or administering cannabis products, which remain appropriately restricted.
3. **The bill requires a therapeutic or health supplementation purpose**, preventing frivolous or recreational recommendations.
4. **Veterinarians already discuss unregulated supplements** with clients as part of standard practice. Cannabis and CBD should be no different.

Conclusion

Senate Bill 54 is a measured, necessary reform that will improve animal welfare in Maryland by allowing veterinarians to do their jobs without fear of professional consequences. It aligns Maryland veterinary law with federal hemp policy, state cannabis policy, and the reality of veterinary practice in 2026.

Pet owners deserve honest, evidence-based guidance from their veterinarians. Animals deserve comprehensive medical care that includes discussions of all relevant therapeutic options. And veterinarians deserve protection when they fulfill their professional duty to provide that care.

I strongly urge the committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** report on SB0054.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacquie Cohen Roth, MS

Founder/CEO, CannabizMD and The Tea Pad Foundation LTD
VP Education and Strategic Partnerships, CannaWorkforce, Inc (EARN Grantee)
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Submitted to:
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Annapolis, MD – January 30, 2026

Testimony from the Maryland State Chapter of the
National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML)

SUPPORT SB0054
(State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners – Grounds for Disciplinary
Action – Restrictions)

Maryland NORML has no paid staff – we are entirely energized by a core group of citizen volunteers and more than 5,000 other Marylanders committed to ending marijuana prohibition and establishing a regulated cannabis commercial market for adults. I have never had any stake or investment of any kind in any cannabis enterprise, nor does anyone in my family, and I have never received any fee or remuneration for consulting with any cannabis enterprise. As an organization, we have worked to reform state and federal marijuana laws for more than 50 years.

We are in strong support of Senate Bill 54, which provides needed clarity and protection for licensed veterinarians in Maryland.

Senate Bill 54 takes a narrow, commonsense approach, affirming that licensed professionals should be able to engage in open, evidence-informed conversations with animal owners without fear of automatic professional sanction. This legislation does not compel any treatment, alter existing standards of care, or interfere with the Board’s authority to address misconduct, negligence, or unlawful activity.

Regulatory frameworks must evolve to protect professional speech and informed decision-making. SB0054 aligns Maryland with these principles while preserving appropriate oversight and public safety.

For these reasons and more, we urge a favorable report on SB0054.

M. Luke Jones, Maryland NORML