

**2020 SESSION  
POSITION PAPER**

**BILL NO:** HB 870  
**COMMITTEE:** Finance  
**POSITION:** Support as Amended

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**TITLE:** Natalie M. LaPrade Medical Cannabis Commission – Compassionate Use Fund – Revisions

**BILL ANALYSIS:** House Bill 870, as amended, requires the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission (the Commission) to adopt regulations to implement the Compassionate Use Fund to reimburse licensed dispensaries for providing reduced cost medical cannabis to Medicaid enrollees and veterans. The regulations must include procedures for assessing and collecting fees from medical cannabis growers, processors, and dispensaries, which will provide the funding mechanism for implementing the Compassionate Use Fund.

**POSITION AND RATIONALE:** The Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission (the Commission) supports HB 870, as amended by the House Health and Government Operations Committee’s Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, the bill’s sponsor.

Medical cannabis is currently not covered by the Maryland Medical Assistance Program or insurance. Although the cost of medical cannabis in Maryland is on par with other medical-only jurisdictions, the median patient expenditure in 2019 ranged from \$260 to \$310 per month, and represents a financial hardship and sacrifice for many patients and their families. Since the inception of the Maryland Medical Cannabis Program, patients, caregivers, providers, and many other constituencies have voiced concerns over the cost of medical cannabis for low-income and other vulnerable populations. HB 870, as amended, provides a viable strategy – endorsed by grower, processor, and dispensary stakeholders – for making medical cannabis affordable, and therefore more accessible to Medicaid enrollees and veterans.

The Commission also supports Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk’s proposed amendment to rename HB 870 the “**Fakiza Rahman Act**.” Ms. Fakiza Rahman was the Commission’s Director of Operations until she passed away earlier this month after a nearly two-year battle with cancer. Fakiza was the most hard-working, compassionate, and generous employee and co-worker, and the Commission and the State of Maryland are forever changed for the better because of her efforts. She cared immensely for this program and for each of the patients who sought relief in it. Renaming HB 870 the “Fakiza Rahman Act” is a fitting tribute to her everlasting memory and to her immutable efforts to help seriously ill and injured Marylanders.

Fakiza started with the Commission in April 2017 – the same week the patient registry opened – and over the past three years helped tens of thousands of Marylanders register to obtain medical cannabis to treat seizure disorders, severe or chronic pain, cancer-associated pain and nausea,

glaucoma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and many other life-threatening or serious medical conditions. Fakiza also administered the State’s medical cannabis seed-to-sale tracking system (METRC) and agent registration system (Complia), and supervised nearly two dozen employees. She did everything at the Commission. If anyone – a Commission member or employee, patient, caregiver, provider, or licensee – had a question, Fakiza was the one we so often went to for an answer. Simply put, she was the best of us. The best coworker, manager, mentor, and friend.

Fakiza was also the embodiment of a selfless public servant. She gave everything she had to the Commission and to the patients of Maryland; working nights and weekends, and always volunteering first whenever anyone needed assistance. Even continuing to assist staff and patients while she was in the hospital fighting for her life.

**For these reasons, the Commission supports HB 870 and the proposed amendment to rename the bill the “Fakiza Rahman Act.” We thank Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk for her leadership on this important legislation.**

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