



Maryland Chapter

Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America

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Testimony for SB 708, Cannabis - Legalization and Regulation, Senate Finance Committee

Date: March 4, 2021

From: Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America (SARDAA),
Maryland Chapter, Evelyn Burton, Advocacy Chair

Position: **SUPPORT with Amendments**

The Maryland chapter of the Schizophrenia and Related Disorders Alliance of America (SARDAA) supports SB 708 because for those who choose to use cannabis, it will provide a standardized product and reduce the risk of adulteration with more harmful drugs.

However, we remain very concerned about the effects of cannabis use by those with schizophrenia and those with a genetic vulnerability to psychotic illnesses.

SB 708 requires the development of a scientifically accurate safety information label, handout, or both. It also requires that the safety label and/or handout advise of any adverse effects unique to younger adults, including effects related to the developing mind. However, we do not believe this provides adequate protection for those with schizophrenia or genetic vulnerabilities to psychotic illnesses.

According to the American Psychological Association, significant brain development occurs not just during the adolescent years but through the age of 24.¹ Schizophrenia is a developmental neurological brain condition that most frequently becomes evident between adolescence and 30 years of age.² In the July 2020 Marijuana Research Report of the National Institute of drug abuse,³ it states “Recent research ... has found that people who use marijuana and carry a specific variant of the AKT1 gene, ... are at increased risk of developing psychosis. ... One study found that the risk of psychosis among those with this variant was seven times higher for those who used marijuana daily compared with those who used it infrequently or used none at all.” In addition, the report found “Marijuana use has also been shown to worsen the course of illness in patients who already have schizophrenia.”

Therefore, we request the following AMENDMENTS to SB 708:

1. Require that BOTH a label AND a handout be developed and that the label and the handout be provided with each cannabis product.
2. Require that warnings about the risk of worsening schizophrenia and the risk of psychosis in those with genetic vulnerabilities be required on the labeling and in the handout.
3. In Section 23-301(C)(3)(I)2 (page 57, line 14): Change “mind” to “brain.”
4. If it cannot be determined that a consumer is at least 21 years of age, the retailer must require that Government-issued proof of age be shown before selling any cannabis product.

We believe it is essential for those with schizophrenia or at a high risk for psychosis be clearly warned that cannabis use poses increased and very serious risks for them. Our amendments would alert them to those risks. They would help protect those with schizophrenia from a worsening course of illness and help prevent early psychosis from developing in those with genetic risk of schizophrenia.

Thank you for your consideration of these amendments.

¹<https://www.apa.org/monitor/julaug04/brain#:~:text=The%20research%20also%20shows%20that,when%20making%20decisions%2C%20he%20said>

² https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/schizophrenia.shtml#part_156807

³<https://www.drugabuse.gov/download/1380/marijuana-research-report.pdf?v=d9e67cbd412ae5f340206c1a0d9c2bfd>