

March 8, 2023

Dear Mr. or Madame Chair and members of the committee,

I am writing to you regarding provisions of bill SB0516 (“Cannabis Reform”). Although cannabis legalization has already been enacted in Maryland by referendum last November, legislation is needed to protect Maryland residents from potential negative consequences on public health and safety. The current bill falls short in efforts to accomplish this.

This issue strikes a personal chord with me for multiple reasons. First, my sister, who lived in California for many years, was prescribed medical marijuana for pain relief from a back injury. However, I am certain that her exposure to excessive amounts of THC from smoking marijuana was instrumental in her untimely death at age 53 from congestive heart failure. More research is clearly needed, but numerous articles in medical journals indicate an association between cannabis use and increased risk of negative cardiovascular events, such as stroke, epilepsy, acute myocardial infarction, congestive heart failure, and arrhythmia.

As the mother of young children, I am also gravely concerned about potential impacts on them. Although marijuana use by minors is still illegal, there can be no doubt that its more widespread availability will vastly increase the number of children and adolescents consuming it, despite restrictions. Medical research has demonstrated that cannabis use by young people up to the age of 25 is associated with stunted brain development. In addition, research by the Institute for Behavior and Health indicates that the earlier a child or adolescent begins consuming either alcohol or drugs, the greater the chance that he or she will develop a life-long substance abuse problem.

Statistics collected in western states where cannabis was first legalized show that cannabis is a powerful gateway drug and that many teenagers who use marijuana will inevitably move on to stronger drugs. Moreover, the alarming trend in society’s stance on drug use from cautionary to permissive suggests to young people that safeguards restricting drug use are suspicious and may be unnecessary. This is the absolute wrong message to send our youth, given the current explosion in drug addiction and deaths from fentanyl poisoning in the U.S.

States that have legalized recreational marijuana have seen an associated increase in traffic-related incidents and fatalities. I also witnessed countless incidents of people smoking marijuana in their cars while driving or sitting in their cars in public parking lots. I have also been personally impacted by exposure to second-hand marijuana smoke in public places and hotels, which has cause me to feel ill.

Research shows that marijuana available today is much more potent than that of past decades, making it highly addictive and more likely to produce negative health effects. The current bill does not include sufficient controls for protection of consumers. It should establish a potency cap, such as that enacted by some other states like Vermont and Connecticut. It should also require strong warning labels on cannabis products, including visual graphics of the dangers of use on its packaging, in advertisements, and on websites established for its promotion or sale.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,

Heather Franz, Clarksville, MD