



NATASHA DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

MELISSA ROTHSTEIN
CHIEF OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
ACTING DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB0653: Child in Need of Assistance- Neglect- Cannabis Use

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 03/13/2023

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 0653.

I am Zina Charles, a licensed social worker with the Maryland Office of the Public Defender Parental Defensive Team. I am writing this letter in support of Senate Bill 0653: Child in Need of Assistance- Neglect- Cannabis Use.

Research has shown that cannabis is not a “gateway” drug and is accurately described as a “terminus” drug due to the majority of people who use cannabis do not go on to use other illicit drugs¹. Cannabis use is known to help reduce anxiety, enhance mood, and be an alternative for pain management instead of using prescription opioids^{2,3}.

In 2022, the people of Maryland voted and received a 67.2% favor to legalize cannabis use in the State of Maryland for adults 21 and over⁴. Maryland has taken the steps to decriminalize cannabis use and we need to continue by not considering cannabis use as a form of neglect.

In my position, I have seen cannabis use presented in court as a reason to find children in need of assistance (CINA) even with a medical card. I have witnessed arguments about what is a reasonable amount of cannabis use when the user is under the direction of a doctor. Parents/caregivers successfully completed court-mandated services and still are not reunited with their children due to positive urinalysis of cannabis.

Starting July 1, 2023, adults will be able to legally use and possess cannabis⁴. Families should not be separated due to the legal use of cannabis. Passing this bill will help to keep families together and protect parents/caregivers from facing legal consequences of neglect for the legal use of cannabis. **For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 0653.**

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

Authored by:

Zina Charles, LGSW, LMSW, Social Worker
Parental Defense Division- Rockville Office
Maryland Office of the Public Defender
zina.charles@maryland.gov

1. Drug Policy Alliance. Debunking the “Gateway” Myth (2017). https://drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DebunkingGatewayMyth_NY_0.pdf
2. Janet E. Joy, Stanley J. Watson, Jr., and John A. Benson, Jr., “Marijuana and Medicine: Assessing the Science Base,” Division of Neuroscience and Behavioral Research, Institute of Medicine (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999).
3. Reiman, A., Welty, M., & Solomon, P. (2017). Cannabis as a substitute for opioid-based pain medication: patient self-report. *Cannabis and cannabinoid research*, 2(1), 160-166. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5569620/>
4. Marijuana Policy Project (2023). Bills to Regulate and Tax Adult Use Cannabis Introduced! <https://www.mpp.org/states/maryland/#:~:text=Last%20year%2C%20Maryland%20voters%20voted,ballot%20measure%20to%20legalize%20cannabis.>

Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division, 45 Calvert St, Suite 108, Annapolis MD 21401
For further information please contact Elizabeth Hilliard, Elizabeth.hilliard@maryland.gov 443-507-8414.