



Maryland Chiefs of Police Association Maryland Sheriffs' Association



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair and
Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Darren Popkin, Executive Director, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Andrea Mansfield, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee
Natasha Mehu, Representative, MCPA-MSA Joint Legislative Committee

DATE: February 7, 2023

RE: **HB 280 – Criminal Law – Cannabis-Related Offenses – Civil Penalties**

POSITION: OPPOSE

The Maryland Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA) and the Maryland Sheriffs' Association (MSA) OPPOSE HB 280. This bill changes from a misdemeanor to a civil penalty the possession of certain quantities of cannabis.

MCPA and MSA do not typically take a position on sentencing matters. However, in this instance, reducing the penalty for cannabis under certain situations is unwise. As it has now been approximately 10 years since marijuana became legal in several states, the proliferation of the illegitimate cannabis market has brought with it a significant increase in violent crime. Under current Maryland Law, the penalties are intended to respond to not only the dangerousness of the particular substance, but also the violence that is often associated with illegal drug trade. As other states have seen, once marijuana is legal, the illegal market indisputably becomes larger and as Maryland has seen even prior to legalization, daily in our State, homicides, armed robberies, shootings, and illegal firearm possessions occur during or because of the illegal cannabis market.

Reducing the penalties for cannabis at this time, prior to assessing the actual impacts of the illegal drug market once legalized, would likely bring an increase in crime and violence that is directly associated with the illegitimate cannabis market. The MSA and MCPA understand the need for regulations associated with the legalization of marijuana in Maryland, but unfortunately as other states have experienced, reducing criminal penalties at this time is very concerning to the safety of our communities.

For these reasons, MCPA and MSA OPPOSE HB 280 and request an UNFAVORABLE Committee report.