



CAROLYN A. QUATTROCKI
Chief Deputy Attorney General

LEONARD J. HOWIE III
Deputy Attorney General

CARRIE J. WILLIAMS
Deputy Attorney General

ZENITA WICKHAM HURLEY
Chief, Equity, Policy, and Engagement

STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
HEALTH EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY UNIT

WILLIAM D. GRUHN
Division Chief

PETER V. BERNIS
General Counsel

CHRISTIAN E. BARRERA
Chief Operating Officer

IRNISE F. WILLIAMS
Assistant Attorney General

ANTHONY G. BROWN
Attorney General

February 21, 2025

TO: The Honorable C. T. Wilson, Chair
Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Irnise F. Williams, Deputy Director, Health Education and Advocacy Unit

RE: House Bill 1377- Cannabis - Advertising - Prohibited Locations (Equity in Cannabis Advertising Act)- **LETTER OF CONCERN**

The Health Education and Advocacy Unit of the Consumer Protection Division submits a letter of concern regarding House Bill 1377. In 2023, when recreational cannabis laws were enacted, the Consumer Protection Division (CPD) urged strict advertising measures in part to protect children from being exposed to advertising that specifically targeted minors, including constant advertising by the cannabis industry through billboards and outdoor advertising. We are concerned this bill will eliminate some of those protections.

Outdoor Signage

This bill would permit an advertisement on the side of a building or another publicly visible location of any form, including a sign, a poster, a placard, a device, a graphic display, an outdoor billboard, or a freestanding signboard. Allowing such advertising undermines public health interests and would be inconsistent with the types of restrictions our Consumer Protection Division imposed in a settlement with Juul Labs over deceptive marketing and the sale of e-cigarettes to minors.

A 2021 [study](#) found that adolescent cannabis usage increased based on the amount of exposure to billboards advertising cannabis. Any exposure to billboards significantly increased the odds that the adolescent would suffer Cannabis Use Disorder, with adolescents who saw billboards regularly having seven times the odds of weekly use and six times the odds of Cannabis Use Disorder.

A [Maryland Cannabis Use baseline study](#) found that, “More than 25 percent of Maryland high school students have used cannabis.” Cannabis use in adults and children can lead to the increased risk of depression, anxiety and addiction. The cognitive impacts of the use of cannabis by youth can lead to lower grades, skipping class, and delayed graduation. The [Maryland Cannabis](#)

[dashboard](#) published data stating, “From 2021 to 2023, calls to Poison Centers serving Maryland residents nearly doubled for youths aged nine and younger, tripled for those aged 10 to 14, and increased by over 26 percent for individuals aged 15 to 19.”

Although more studies may need to be done to identify all the risks of cannabis advertising and exposure on vulnerable populations, it is already evident that the legalization of cannabis has led to an increase in youth cannabis usage and even younger children being harmed by cannabis being present in their homes. This bill is likely to dramatically increase the harm to children.

The removal of the outdoor signage prohibition, even with the suggested limitations regarding the location of that signage (advertisements to 500 feet away from treatment centers, schools, daycare centers or other public spaces that children may frequent) does not eliminate the impact these advertisements will have on those vulnerable communities. Allowing what will likely become a proliferation of outdoor advertising will undoubtedly expose vulnerable youth to cannabis which could lead to an increased use by Marylanders under the age of 21 and would create indirect risks and harm to the youth of Maryland.

Targeting Minors

We support the bill’s addition of specific examples of marketing that target or is attractive to minors to make clear for the industry the types of marketing that currently violates Title 13, Subtitle 3 of the Commercial Law article. There is an enormous body of evidence about the risks to children who might accidentally or unknowingly ingest cannabis products, especially edibles that are “disguised” as branded foods (e.g., Cannabis Doritos or Gummy Bears), or packaged or labeled in a way that would attract minors (use of cartoons, animal or fruit shaped products, likeness of a character developed for children, and more).

Here are two images of concern posted on the [FTC’s website](#).



As noted above, according to the Maryland Department of Health’s Cannabis Public Health data dashboard, “calls to poison centers have surged, especially among those under the age of 20. From 2021 to 2023, calls to Poison Centers serving Maryland residents nearly doubled for youths aged

nine and younger, tripled for those aged 10 to 14, and increased by over 26 percent for individuals aged 15 to 19.” Undoubtedly, some of these calls were related to child-directed packaging.

False or Misleading Statements

We oppose the provision that bans “false or misleading statements,” because such statements are already prohibited conduct; the statute prohibits advertisements that violate the Consumer Protection Act. The addition of this language is inconsistent with current state law, could be read to reduce consumer protections, and may cause confusion.

cc: The Honorable Marlon Amprey