

**Chairwoman Beidle, distinguished members of the Committee,**

My name is Brad Klukas, and I represent Howard County Fire and Rescue Local 2000. I am submitting this written testimony supporting SB-1023 allowing for responsible, off-duty, medicinal cannabis use for firefighters.

Last year when a similar bill was presented by the Professional Firefighters of Maryland, it was advocating for recreational use. This bill would be for Medical Marijuana cards only, ensuring that the firefighters would first have to seek physician advice on how to address the issues that they were having. Only once the physician decided that medical cannabis was the appropriate medicine would the firefighter need access to it.

No policy changes within the Locals have to be made to allow for this. Cannabis should be treated the same way any other Controlled Substance is. If you are ON duty and impaired, you should be held accountable. When testing for a Controlled Substance, for instance opioids, there are NO testing levels to ensure that someone is not under the influence. When an individual is found to be possibly impaired it is simply up to the officers discretion if that individual is fit for duty that day. If the answer is no, they are sent for testing and disciplined for being at work and under the influence. The testing is simply to ensure that there are no other potentials for other CDS that they are not prescribed. A simple prescription does NOT allow any firefighter to be under the influence of ANY medication.

Chesapeake Health has reached out to Howard County Fire and Rescue (and to anyone else in the State) to offer a one-day course on identifying CDS intoxication if there is a lack of understanding. In addition, it is a daily occurrence in the fire service to identify intoxication for the patients we treat having medical emergencies, motor vehicle accidents, etc. Firefighters and officers are well versed in understanding impairment. There isn't one of us, I can assure you, that want to ride with someone who is impaired. Our lives quite literally rely on that person to your left and right to be physically and mentally capable to do whatever the next call requires of us.

As you may know, firefighters face extraordinary risks every day and the toll on our health is immense. We're 150% more likely to develop cancer than the general public, and 20% more likely to die from it. **72% of firefighter line-of-duty deaths are from cancer.** This is not just a statistic—it's a harsh reality for those of

us who risk our lives for others. Emerging research is showing that cannabis could offer a breakthrough in the fight against cancer, specifically halting tumor growth and preventing metastasis. Cannabis is already FDA approved to treat nausea, loss of appetite, and other side effects associated with chemotherapy. This includes cancers listed in the Presumptive Disability Law, like brain, breast, colon, lymphoma, and prostate cancers.

But the dangers don't stop with physical health. Mental health challenges, particularly PTSD, are rampant in the fire service. Firefighters are tragically three times more likely to die by suicide than a traumatic line of duty death. Studies show it can alleviate PTSD symptoms and even prevent its onset when used after exposure to trauma. It also significantly reduces alcohol consumption—offering a healthier way to cope.

Another serious concern is sleep disturbances. Chronic sleep deprivation contributes to depression, anxiety, and poor job performance. Cannabis has shown significant potential to improve sleep quality and duration, helping firefighters recover from the physical and mental strains of the job.

Within our local governments we have tried to ask for an allowance in our substance abuse policies for medicinal marijuana prescriptions, to no avail. We presented a policy that covered all of the questions that they had about testing, reasonable suspicion, post accident testing, as well as identifying on duty substance abuse. The end reason for the answer being a “no” was based off of possible political backlash. No other medication that is approved for use in the State of Maryland is treated like this. We feel that it is unfair to limit the availability of ANY medication that could bring our firefighters back to work sooner, healthier, and more capable of doing the job.

In conclusion, the growing body of research clearly demonstrates that cannabis has the potential to address the unique health challenges faced by firefighters. It's not just a matter of pain relief—it's about protecting and saving lives. I urge you to consider the impact this could have on the health and safety of those who dedicate their lives to protecting others.

Thank you for your time and consideration.