

February 16, 2025

Dr. Patrick Southall, PharmD, MBA
Director of Pharmacy Operations
St. Matthews Specialty Pharmacy
200 Hurstbourne Parkway, Ste. 178
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Delegate Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair of Health and Government Operations Committee
240 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Del. Pena-Melnyk,

I am writing today to express my support of HB0996, limiting the sale and distribution of Phenibut. Phenibut is more insidious than most drugs that we think of as being problematic. The use of Phenibut is linked to addiction, severe withdrawal and life-threatening overdoses among individuals who are unaware of its potential dangers. Phenibut has no legitimate medical use and should be listed as a Schedule 1 controlled substance. It shames me to know how easily someone can walk into a gas station and come out with an unregulated synthetic substance, a substance more dangerous than drugs that I keep under lock and key. HB0996 will at least offer protection to our most vulnerable.

My current role is the Director of Operation for a Specialty Pharmacy servicing patients struggling with substance use disorder. The most common similarity that I see with patients under my care is that they were not given the opportunity to make an informed decision. Maybe they were prescribed narcotics for a legitimate reason but left on too high of a dosage for too long. Perhaps someone they respected offered them an addictive substance and they wanted to fit in. But I believe had most of them known the consequences, many could have avoided the shame and pain of addiction and the life-threatening circumstances. The unregulated sale of Phenibut allows individuals to obtain this dangerous substance without knowledge of its risks. HB0996 raises awareness of the dangers.

In closing, this proposed legislation is important to me as a Maryland licensed pharmacist and as an uncle who lost a nephew to a Phenibut overdose. I applaud Maryland for having the courage and moral standards to do what the federal government and most other states have failed to do. To criminalize manipulative marketing of addictive drugs to vulnerable populations. To institute definitive measures to curtail the distribution of harmful substances. To protect our citizens from harm. Send a clear message that the safety of our communities is a priority. Please don't waste this opportunity to protect the citizens of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Patrick Southall, PharmD, MBA