



Testimony - HB 797, Employment Discrimination - Fire and Rescue Public Safety  
Employees - Use of Medical Cannabis  
Favorable  
House Economic Matters Committee  
March 11, 2026  
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Honorable Chairwoman Valderrama & Members of the House Economic Matters  
Committee:

Firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, and other fire and rescue public safety employees perform some of the most demanding and high-risk work in our communities. The physical and psychological toll of this work is real, cumulative, and well documented. HB 797 appropriately recognizes that these workers should not face discipline, termination, or other adverse employment actions solely because they lawfully use medical cannabis pursuant to a valid written certification.

More broadly, this bill reflects an important principle for workers and professionals across the state: legal conduct and lawful professional speech should not be grounds for discipline or job loss. In a state that has legalized cannabis for both medical and adult-use, workers should not be forced to navigate vague or outdated enforcement regimes that expose them to adverse employment actions simply for acknowledging or discussing legal products. HB 797 provides clarity, fairness, and due process—values that are essential to protecting workers' livelihoods.

This legislation reflects an important and commonsense principle: a positive test for cannabis metabolites does not equate to on-the-job impairment. Fire and rescue employees can responsibly and legally manage medical conditions off duty while still reporting to work fit for duty and fully capable of performing their jobs. HB 797 draws that distinction clearly, while preserving employers' authority to prohibit impairment on

duty, maintain safety-sensitive standards, and comply with applicable federal requirements.

SEIU Local 500 strongly supports the bill's balanced approach. It protects public safety workers from unjust discrimination while ensuring that workplace safety and public trust remain paramount. No worker who saves lives for a living should be forced to choose between their health and their career.

At the same time, HB 797 highlights a broader issue that the General Assembly will need to address in the future. Fire and rescue employees are not the only public workers subject to outdated drug testing policies and adverse employment actions for lawful cannabis use. Educators, higher education workers, social service professionals, and other public servants face similar risks without comparable protections. While HB 797 is appropriately tailored to fire and rescue employees, SEIU Local 500 urges the legislature to view this bill as a critical first step toward extending these same fair and evidence-based protections to all public sector workers.

Maryland has legalized and regulated medical cannabis. Our employment laws must continue to evolve accordingly—starting with those on the front lines of public safety, and ultimately ensuring fairness and consistency for the entire public workforce.

SEIU Local 500 believes this legislation sets an important precedent for protecting licensed professionals from unjust discipline while respecting the will of Maryland voters and lawmakers who have legalized cannabis. We ask the Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 797 and hope that the General Assembly will address the greater need for clear worker protections against adverse employment actions around cannabis use. Thank you to Delegate Boafu for leading on this important issue

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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