

CAROLYN A. QUATTROCKI
Chief Deputy Attorney General

LEONARD J. HOWIE III
Deputy Attorney General

CARRIE J. WILLIAMS
Deputy Attorney General

SHARON S. MERRIWEATHER
Deputy Attorney General

ZENITA WICKHAM HURLEY
Deputy Attorney General



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

ANTHONY G. BROWN
Attorney General

WILLIAM D. GRUHN
Division Chief

PETER V. BERNIS
General Counsel

CHRISTIAN E. BARRERA
Chief of Staff

IRNISE WILLIAMS
Deputy Unit Director

March 31, 2026

TO: The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama
Chair, Economic Matters Committee

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

RE: Senate Bill 594 – Cannabis-Advertising – Alterations - **OPPOSITION**

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General (the “Division”) opposes Senate Bill 594. Senate Bill 594 would allow cannabis advertisements and representations in cannabis advertisements to indirectly target and be attractive to children, which could result in lasting harm. It would also allow cannabis businesses to advertise if the most recent *and* readily available data (removing a reliability requirement) from TV, radio, internet, mobile apps, social media or other electronic communication, or print to show that the audience is expected to be 21. Under this bill business owners would be permitted to advertise at events and provide sponsorships if the event organizer signs an attestation form affirming that 85% of the attendees will be 21 and up. And the bill would now hold harmless cannabis licensees whose trademarks, brands, names, locations, or other distinguishing characteristics are used in news stories, documentaries, or other similar content, not intended as commercial advertising as long as the business or its associates have not paid for the commercial advertising.

The Division urges the Economic Matters Committee to vote, No, on Senate Bill 594.

Current Law

Advertising to Children

The current law, among other things, prohibits advertising for any cannabis licensee, cannabis product, or cannabis-related service that “directly *or indirectly target(s)* individuals under the age of 21 years,” or contains a design, illustration, picture, or representation that “targets *or is attractive to*” minors, including a cartoon character, mascot, or other depiction commonly used to market products to minors. Md. Code Ann., Alco. Bev. § 36-903(a)(1).

The law also prohibits advertising by television, radio, internet, mobile application, social media, or other electronic communication, event sponsorship, or print publication, unless the advertisement meets an audience composition requirement: it must be reasonably expected that at least 85% of the audience will be over 21 years old, based on *reliable* and *current* audience composition data. *Id.*

Third-Party Use of Advertisements

The current law prohibits a cannabis licensee from allowing the use of its trademarks, brands, names, locations, or other distinguishing characteristics for third-party use for advertisements that do not comply with the law. *Id.* § 36-903(b)(4).

Harms to Maryland Consumers

The Division enforces the Consumer Protection Act § 13-301, *et. seq.* (CPA), longstanding in Maryland, with the purpose of preventing unfair or deceptive practices in connection with sales of merchandise in the state. Md. Code Ann., Com. Law § 13-102(a). The prevention of unfair or deceptive trade practices and the protection of children are among the minimum standards the CPA has established, and the Division has enforced for the benefit of Maryland consumers, for decades. *See id.* § 13-103. Hence, the Division has the following concerns about Senate Bill 594.

Senate Bill 594 appears to allow for *indirect* targeting of individuals under age 21 with cannabis advertisements, including with representations that are *attractive to minors*. Advertisements for cannabis that target children, even indirectly or with language or images that are attractive to minors, can result in lasting harms. *Advertising is impactful.*

A 2025 study from the International Journal of Drug Policy found that cannabis advertising of certain features shown to be appealing to adolescents significantly increased youth interest in cannabis use and positive attitudes toward the advertisement.¹ Another study, in 2021, found that adolescent cannabis usage increased exponentially based on the amount of exposure to billboards advertising cannabis.²

A Maryland Cannabis Use baseline study found that, “[m]ore than 25 percent of Maryland high school students have used cannabis.”³ The Maryland Cannabis dashboard published data stating, “From 2021 to 2023, [cannabis-related] 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.”⁴

¹ See Alisa A. Padon et al., *Characteristics and Effects of Cannabis Advertisements with Appeal to Youth in California*, Int'l J. Drug Pol'y, Mar. 2025, art. 104718, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0955395925000179>.

² See Pamela J Trangenstein, et. al, *Cannabis Marketing and Problematic Cannabis Use Among Adolescents*, J. Stud Alcohol Drugs. 2021 Mar;82(2):288-296, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33823976/>.

³ See Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission. *Maryland Cannabis Use Baseline Study: March 1, 2023*. https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDH/NMLMCC/HG13-4401%28b%29_2022.pdf

⁴ <https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/Cannabis-Public-Health-data-dashboard-launched.aspx>.

The negative impacts of cannabis use on children and adolescents are well-documented. Cannabis use in adults and children can lead to the increased risk of depression, anxiety and addiction.

A January 2026 study published by the American Association of Pediatrics found that adolescents who used cannabis once or twice a month reported higher rates of depression-like symptoms, anxiety, and impulsive behavior than those who abstained. Near-daily users were almost four times as likely to have poor grades and were frequently disengaged from school activities. These associations were even stronger for younger cannabis users.⁵

Emerging research shows a connection between teen cannabis use and an increased risk of developing certain serious mental illnesses. Last month, the JAMA Health Forum published a study that, after excluding adolescents who had symptoms of mental illness before using cannabis, found an increased risk of psychiatric disorders, including psychotic, bipolar, depressive, and anxiety disorders, in adolescents who self-reported cannabis use in the past year.⁶ Cannabis can be particularly addicting for children. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 1-in-6 people who start using the drug before the age of 18 can become addicted, versus 1-in-10 people who start using as adults.⁷

These findings collectively demonstrate how loosening advertising restrictions and normalizing cannabis—in conjunction with powerful marketing—could exacerbate public health risks and youth exposure in Maryland.

Advertising that indirectly appeals to children — including through imagery or media designed to attract minors — amplifies these well-documented harms and will inevitably lead to a rise in similar promotions, like those shown in the attached document. Such advertising exposes vulnerable youth to cannabis, increasing the likelihood of use by individuals under 21 and creating additional risks for Maryland’s young people. Maryland children should not be subjected to this type of advertising.

Third-Party Use of Advertisements

The Division also opposes the language in Senate Bill 594 that would hold harmless cannabis licensees whose trademarks, brands, names, locations, or other distinguishing characteristics are used by third parties in violation of the law, even if the content is not paid for by the business. The proposed language would create a loophole in the law that could easily be exploited with news articles, documentaries and other editorial content. Moreover, without the addition of

⁵ See Ryan S. Sultan et al., *Cannabis Use Among US Adolescents*, Pediatrics, Jan. 2026, 1 art. e2024070509, <https://www.binasss.sa.cr/ene26/52.pdf> (finding that users under 16 “showed greater susceptibility for academic and emotional indicators.”)

⁶ In this study, the link between adolescent cannabis use and depressive and anxiety disorders decreased with age and were no longer significant among young adults aged 21 to 25 years. This reveals the particular risk cannabis use poses to children under 21. See Kelly C. Young-Wolff et al., *Adolescent Cannabis Use and Risk of Psychotic, Bipolar, Depressive, and Anxiety Disorders*, JAMA Health Forum, Feb. 20, 2026, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama-health-forum/fullarticle/2845356>.

⁷ Substance Abuse & Mental Health Servs. Admin., *Know the Risks of Marijuana*, <https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/learn/marijuana/risks>

disincentives, such as fines for third-party violators, this change would increase legal violations, including CPA violations.

Therapeutic or Medical Claims

Before being amended out of SB594, the bill sought to define “therapeutic or medical claim” to include only claims that “explicitly” state that a cannabis product can diagnose, treat, mitigate, cure, or prevent a disease or condition. This specific amendment would have caused confusion, because it appeared to allow advertisements that make *implicit* therapeutic or medical claims that are not supported by competent or reliable scientific evidence and that do not include information on the most serious and most common side effects or risks associated with the use of cannabis. The Division urges the committee to reject any attempt to define “therapeutic or medical claim” as claims that *explicitly* state a product can diagnose, treat, mitigate, cure, or prevent a disease or condition.”

The Consumer Protection Act prohibits *any* false, falsely disparaging, or misleading oral or written statement that has the capacity, tendency, or effect of deceiving or misleading consumers. Md. Code Ann., Com. Law § 13-301(1). Implicit claims and advertisements, whether to children or adults, are covered by the CPA. Elimination of the prohibition against misleading implicit medical claims from the statute would be inconsistent with the CPA and would encourage advertising that violates the CPA.

Proposed Action

The Division urges the Finance Committee to vote, No, on Senate Bill 594.

cc: Senator Gile
Chair Pamela Beidle



- **Link:** <https://dopecooks420.com/>
- **Location:** Tacoma, Washington



- **Link:** <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/oct/21/buddie-responsible-ohio-mascot-joe-camel-big-business>
- **Location:** Ohio



- **Link:** <https://www.instagram.com/p/C7KO877y4nU/>
- **Location:** Could not retrieve location.



Cereal Milk Strain Delta 8 THC Flower

- **Link:** <https://maryjanesbakeryco.com/>
- **Location:** Miami, Florida



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