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March 2, 2026

To: The Honorable Kriselda Valderrama, Chair
Economic Matters Committee

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

Re: House Bill 1519 - Cannabis - Management Service Agreements, Advertising, and Penalties - Alterations (Cannabis Reform and Opportunity Act) – **OPPOSE**

The Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General (the “Division”) opposes the provisions in House Bill 1519 that fundamentally alter advertising restrictions that were carefully crafted to protect minors and prevent a proliferation of cannabis advertising that would normalize cannabis use among minors. HB1519 would allow, among other things, advertising that *suggests or implies* cannabis products can diagnose, treat, mitigate, cure, or prevent a disease or condition, even if that claim is not backed by science. The bill would also allow for the indirect targeting of children with cannabis advertisements and representations in cannabis advertisements that are attractive to minors. And, should this bill pass, large outdoor displays, including billboards, would be permitted except within 500 feet of certain locations. Moreover, HB1519 would encourage violations of the Consumer Protection Act, which could result in lasting harm to consumers, including children.

The Current Law

The following is a summary of sections of the current cannabis advertising law that are relevant to the Division’s opposition to the proposed changes in HB1519.

Therapeutic or Medical Claims

The current cannabis advertising law requires that any advertisement for cannabis, cannabis products, or cannabis-related services that makes “therapeutic or medical claims” be 1) supported by competent and reliable scientific evidence, and 2) include information on the most serious and most common side effects or risks associated with the use of cannabis. The law does not currently define, “therapeutic or medical claim.” Md. Code Ann., Alco. Bev. & Cann. § 36-902.

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 protects children by limiting outdoor signage to signs on the premises of the business for the limited purpose of identifying the business to the public. Current 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).

The Proposed Amendments

HB1519 proposes the following related amendments to the current law.

Therapeutic or Medical Claims

HB1519 defines “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 will cause confusion, because it appears 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.

Advertising to Children

HB1519 deletes “or indirectly” in Md. Code Ann., Alco. Bev. § 36-903(a)(1)(ii), removing the prohibition against advertisements that indirectly target individuals under the age of 21. The bill also removes “or is attractive to” from § 36-903(a)(1)(iii)(1), removing the prohibition against advertisements containing representations that are attractive to minors. The bill also removes provisions that limit outdoor signage to business identification, allowing large outdoor signage, including billboards except within 500 feet of certain place. Finally, the bill proposes for determining audience composition 1) “the most recent and readily available” audience composition data from the proposed advertisement source (*e.g.*, data available on the audience composition for whichever television or social media entity will run the advertisement); and 2) at least one alternative method for determining audience composition, to be adopted via new regulations on or before January 1, 2027.

Third-Party Use of Advertisements

HB1519 includes language that would 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.

The Division has the following concerns about HB1519.

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 HB1519.

Deceptive Trade Practices

The CPA 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. HB1519's elimination of the prohibition against misleading implicit medical claims from the statute is inconsistent with the CPA. Thus, HB1519 will encourage advertising that violates the CPA.

Harms to Children

HB1519 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

The negative impacts of cannabis use on children and adolescents are well documented. 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.³ The Maryland Cannabis dashboard published data stating, “From 2021 to 2023, calls to Poison Centers serving

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

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 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.

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. Just this past week, 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 Advertising that indirectly targets children, including through images and media that is attractive to minors, will promote these known harms.

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, primary and secondary 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. Maryland children should not be subjected to such advertising.

Third-Party Use of Advertisements

The Division opposes the language in HB1519 that would hold harmless cannabis licensees whose trademarks, brands, names, locations, or other distinguishing characteristics are used by

⁴ <https://health.maryland.gov/newsroom/Pages/Cannabis-Public-Health-data-dashboard-launched.aspx#:~:text=From%202021%20to%202023%2C%20calls,individuals%20aged%2015%20to%2019.>

⁵ See Ryan S. Sultan et al., *Cannabis Use Among US Adolescents*, Pediatrics, Jan. 2026, art. e2024070509, <https://www.binasss.sa.cr/ene26/52.pdf>.

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, at 1, <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>

third parties in violation of the law, even if the content is not intended as commercial advertising. 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 disincentives, such as fines for third-party violators, this change would increase legal violations, including CPA violations.

The Division urges the Committee to vote, unfavorable, on HB1519.

cc: Delegate Marlon Amprey
Delegate Adrian Boafo

This letter is a statement of the Consumer Protection Division's policy position on the referenced pending legislation. For legal or constitutional analysis of the bill, Members of the House and Senate should consult with the Office of Counsel to the General Assembly.



- Link: <https://dopccooks420.com/>



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



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