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MARYLAND

MARYLAND FIRE AND RESCUE INSTITUTE

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Chairman Kriselda Valderrama
Economic Matters Committee
Lowe House Office Building
6 Bladen Street, Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Valderrama,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB797: Employment Discrimination – Fire and Rescue Public Safety Employees - the legal use of cannabis by firefighters and paramedics in the State of Maryland.

As the Executive Director of our State's comprehensive training and education system for all EMS/Fire/Rescue providers, I am deeply concerned about the potential implications that such a policy could have on public safety and the effectiveness of our emergency services.

Firefighters and paramedics are entrusted with the critical responsibility of protecting lives and property. Their roles demand the highest levels of alertness, decision-making, and physical capability. Allowing the use of cannabis, even in a legal context, poses significant risks:

1. **Impaired Judgment and Reaction Time:** Cannabis use can impair cognitive functions, reaction time, and decision-making abilities. This could jeopardize the safety of both emergency responders and the public during critical situations.
2. **Safety Concerns:** The unpredictable nature of cannabis effects may lead to increased workplace accidents and injuries, compromising the safety and well-being of our emergency personnel.
3. **Public Trust:** The community places immense trust in the capabilities of our emergency services. Allowing cannabis use could undermine public confidence in their ability to perform their duties effectively and safely.
4. **Legal and Liability Issues:** The use of cannabis by emergency responders may lead to complex legal and liability challenges, particularly in situations where impaired performance both physically and cognitively could result in harm or loss of life to the public and responders.
5. **Testing Mechanisms:** At the present time there exists no test that can determine the exact time when cannabis was used. This would be disastrous for both the public and members of a public safety response agency as an impaired operator will jeopardize themselves, their crew members, and the citizens they are charged to protect.

I urge the Economic Matters Committee to prioritize the public's safety and effectiveness of our emergency services by maintaining restrictions on cannabis use for firefighters and paramedics. The potential risks far outweigh any perceived benefits, and it is crucial to uphold the highest standards of professionalism and safety in these vital roles.

Thank you for considering this important issue. I am available to discuss this matter further and provide any additional information you may require.

Sincerely,

Michael E. Cox, Jr.

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