



METROPOLITAN FIRE CHIEFS COUNCIL OF MARYLAND

February 16, 2026

Honorable Members of the Economic Matters Committee,

The Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Council of Maryland is respectfully submitting this letter, in order to provide written testimony in opposition of House Bill 0797 (cross-filed with Senate Bill 0439), Employment Discrimination – Fire and Rescue Public Safety Employees – Use of Medical Cannabis.

The fire service operates in one of the most hazardous and cognitively demanding professions in our society. Firefighters must make split-second decisions under extreme stress, often in environments that are immediately life-threatening. Any substance that has the potential to impair judgment, reaction time, coordination, or situational awareness presents a direct risk not only to the individual firefighter, but to fellow crew members and the public they serve.

Cannabis is widely recognized to affect cognitive processing, depth perception, reaction time, and short-term memory. Even when used off-duty, its psychoactive components—particularly THC—can remain in the body and may have residual effects depending on dosage, frequency of use, and individual metabolism. Unlike alcohol, there is currently no universally accepted, reliable real-time impairment standard that clearly determines whether a firefighter is actively impaired at the time of duty. This creates significant enforcement and safety challenges for departments.

There are also significant legal and liability considerations. Many fire departments receive federal funding and must comply with the Drug-Free Workplace Act. Cannabis remains illegal at the federal level. Permitting cannabis use—even where state law allows it—can expose departments to regulatory complications, insurance risks, workers' compensation disputes, and civil liability claims following adverse incidents.

From a public trust perspective, firefighters are consistently ranked among the most trusted professionals. The community expects that those responding to emergencies are unimpaired and fully capable. Policies allowing cannabis use may create perceptions—fair or not—of diminished professionalism or readiness.

For these reasons, we respectfully request an unfavorable report on HB 0797, in order to protect firefighter safety, public safety, and the integrity of the profession.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gordon Wallace
Legislative Subcommittee Chair
Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Council of MD