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March 8, 2026

House Bill -0797

Public Health Initiatives/Access to Medical Cannabis Care for Firefighters/EMS/Paramedics

1-Improving the health of the population and why it is necessary.

Looking ahead, let us take time to talk about public health initiatives. "The US ranks thirty-three out of thirty-eight high-income countries and has almost six times the rate (maternal mortality) of Iceland, the country ranked #1." ¹

As a past and present public health clinician and registered nurse, I have had the privilege of working with Baltimore City firefighters and EMS, via my 10 years of emergency department work at Mercy Medical Center. This renowned medical institution provides care for our Baltimore City First responders. I have worked with and know members of Baltimore City Fire and Rescue personally. These first responders are members of our population, our public servants. They need access to safe and legal cannabis use. The population of Maryland has access to safe medical cannabis. This needs to be enacted into law, with employment protection for our First Responders.

2-Cannabis as medicine.

Cannabis (*Cannabis sativa* L.) is not a new medicine. For millennia, humans have used the cannabis plant for medicine, recreation, religious purposes, and food. The fibers of cannabis plants, also called hemp, have been used to make rope, non-flammable building material and textiles.

"The illegalization of cannabis that occurred over the past decades has caused immeasurable harm to our population as demonstrated by the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of individuals, wars waged between nations, and the vilification of some racial and ethnic groups." ²

Peer reviewed studies have demonstrated improvements in public health metrics/outcomes in states that have had medical and/or recreational cannabis programs for at least seven years.

International Journal of Drug Policy is a renowned peer reviewed professional journal, used by practicing clinicians and researchers. Medical cannabis laws (MCLs) lower individual market health insurance premiums.

Health insurance spending, including premiums, comprises between 16% and 34% of household budgets in the United States. As healthcare costs continue to rise, our findings suggest that households obtaining their health insurance on the individual (i.e., not employer sponsored) market in states with MCLs appreciate significantly lower premiums.

a-Fewer opioid prescriptions written for public and privately insured patients.

b-Documentation supporting the decrease in purchase of beer and self-reported decreases in alcohol and tobacco consumption. A decrease in alcohol related traffic deaths. A decrease in Worker's Compensation claims.

c-Subsequent decrease in opioid prescribing reflects a decrease in opioid rehab services and emergency department and inpatient hospitalizations. Data reflects fewer firearm suicide deaths.³

"Cannabis enables pain patients to cut opioid use; Availability would reduce ER visits and OD deaths."⁴ The downstream effects of these health improvements result in a healthier population.

Why is it important for legislation to protect employment rights for anyone? Cannabis remains a federally illegal substance. Currently, the onus of safe medical cannabis use for our first responders is in the hands of our state of Maryland legislatures.

As noted above, the data reflects improvement in public health outcomes with responsible, educated, and safe cannabis use. Our nation spends more per person on health care yet has poorer health outcomes than other industrialized countries. Veterans Initiative 22 wants to help protect our nation. A healthy population is one pillar necessary to promote and protect democracy. This is why we are speaking with you today.

To our Maryland House of Representatives, please base your policy and votes on science and do what is best for our population and first responders. Pass this legislation to improve the health and wellness of our first responders, in Maryland.

References

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