



Mission: To improve public health in Maryland through education and advocacy

Vision: Healthy Marylanders living in Healthy Communities

WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 0594

Cannabis - Advertising - Alterations

Committee: Economic Matters

By: Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA)

Hearing Date: April 2, 2026

Dear Chair Valderrama, Vice Chair Charkoudian, and members of the House Economic Matters Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 0594.

SB 594 weakens major public health protections in Maryland law that prevent cannabis advertising from reaching those under 21. By narrowing these safeguards, the bill increases the likelihood that youth will be exposed to cannabis marketing. There is no market-based justification for doing so, as Maryland's legal cannabis industry is already strong, with sales exceeding \$1 billion in FY 2024 and FY 2025.¹

The 2024 National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report recommends using evidence from alcohol and tobacco advertising restrictions when shaping cannabis policy.² The expert committee emphasized that youth-focused marketing limits for these substances provide a proven, evidence-based model.

SB 594 eliminates current restrictions on ads that “indirectly target” or are “attractive to” minors. Research shows advertising need not be intentionally aimed at adolescents to influence them, which is why the Master Settlement Agreement prohibits both direct and indirect marketing to underage youth.³

- Studies consistently link exposure to cannabis advertising with^{4,5}:
- Higher adolescent cannabis use
- Increased intentions to use
- More favorable perceptions
- Greater risk of cannabis use disorder

Additionally, the bill would allow more exterior dispensary signage. Even informational signs increase a dispensary's visibility, and greater exposure to cannabis retailers is associated with higher adolescent interest and use.⁶ The added signage provides little real public health or consumer benefit.

SB 594 further shifts how the 85% adult audience requirement is determined, forcing the Maryland Cannabis Administration to rely on audience data supplied by advertisers rather than independent measures such as Nielsen ratings.

The bill also introduces a major loophole by excluding mentions of dispensary branding or business details within news articles, interviews, or editorial content from the definition of advertising—opening the door for unregulated promotional appearances in media and social media.

Conclusion

The Maryland Public Health Association urges an unfavorable report on SB 594 and encourages the General Assembly to maintain Maryland’s strong, evidence-based protections for youth.

Citations:

¹Maryland Cannabis Administration. (n.d.). MCA Medical and Adult-Use Cannabis Data Dashboard. Maryland Cannabis Administration. Retrieved February 17, 2026, from <https://cannabis.maryland.gov/pages/data-dashboard.aspx>

²National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM). 2024. *Cannabis Policy Impacts Public Health and Health Equity*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Doi: 10.17226/27766

³National Association of Attorneys General. (2019). Master Settlement Agreement and exhibits. <https://www.naag.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2019-01-MSA-and-Exhibits-Final.pdf>

⁴Cannabis Marketing and Problematic Cannabis Use Among Adolescents, Pamela J. Trangenstein, et. al., *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 82(2), 288-296 (2021).

⁵Planting the Seed for Marijuana Use: Changes in Exposure to Medical Marijuana Advertising and Subsequent Adolescent Marijuana Use, Cognitions, and Consequences Over Seven Years, Elizabeth J. D’Amico, et al., *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, Volume 188, 385-391 (2018).

⁶Moran, M. B., Tharmarajah, S., Czaplicki, L., Thrul, J., Spindle, T. R., Vandrey, R., Pearson, J. L., & Zamarripa, C. A. (2025). *A narrative review of research on cannabis advertising in the United States*. *Current Addiction Reports*, 12(1), Article 92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-025-00703-1>

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) is a nonprofit, statewide organization of public health professionals dedicated to improving the lives of all Marylanders through education, advocacy, and collaboration. We support public policies consistent with our vision of healthy Marylanders living in healthy, equitable, communities. MdPHA is the state affiliate of the American Public Health Association, a nearly 145-year-old professional organization dedicated to improving population health and reducing the health disparities that plague our state and our nation.

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