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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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SB 594
Cannabis – Advertising – Alterations

Good afternoon Vice Chair Hayes and Members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present SB 594, Cannabis – Advertising – Alterations. Senate Bill 594 endeavors to balance public health safeguards while acknowledging the struggles both newly awarded social equity licensees and operating cannabis licensees have competing in a market saturated by unlicensed and illegal sales of intoxicating THC products – whether hemp or cannabis derived.

Unlicensed businesses :

- do not follow the restrictions on advertising that a licensed business must follow;
- do not charge or remit the higher Cannabis sales and use tax in the State that is imposed on cannabis sold in the regulated market; and
- may be more likely to target and sell intoxicating THC products to minors.

SB 594 balances these policy interests through the careful alteration of existing restrictions on advertising for cannabis licensees in the State.

The bill defines several terms including “Therapeutic or medical claim” to provide clarity for cannabis licensees and consumers on what types of medical claims must be supported with scientific evidence.

SB 594 expands the amount of signage that a licensed standard dispensary is authorized to display on the exterior of the business while also carefully limiting the area of individual signs and the total area of all signs collectively. Currently, a cannabis licensee may only place exterior signage on the premises of the business for the limited purpose of identifying the business to the public. Under the bill, a licensed standard dispensary may also place exterior signage, within the size limits established, to, among other things:

- Identify a business as a Cannabis Trusted Source, an MDH designation indicating a business is licensed;
- Identify a special ownership designation such as a “veteran owned business” or “woman owned business”; and

- Provide public health resources that can be used if an adverse cannabis event occurs, such as the contact information Maryland Poison Center;

SB 594 also creates predictability in advertising for cannabis licensees and ensures that the audience composition for cannabis advertisements meets the requirement that at least 85% of the audience be over the age of 21 by:

- Establishing a statutory method for determining whether an advertisement or a proposed advertisement meets the audience composition threshold; and
- Requiring that the Cannabis Administration establish regulations by January 1, 2027 identifying at least one alternative method for determining audience composition.

News media articles, interviews, and other editorial content over which a licensee has no control from the application of the advertising restrictions are excluded from the requirements.

I respectfully request a “Favorable Report” for SB 594.