

Testimony on Maryland House Bill 0427:

TO: Delegate Heather Bagnall Chair, Health Committee

FROM: Shanetha Lewis, Task Force on the Responsible Use of Natural Psychedelic Substances, Chair Regulations and Governance Committee

DATE: 02/05/2026

BILL: HB0427

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Shanetha Marable-Lewis and I am writing in strong support of HB0427, which extends the Task Force on the Responsible Use of Natural Psychedelic Substances. As a member of the Task Force and former chair of the Regulations and Governance Committee, I have been honored to be a part of and witness firsthand the critical importance of this work and the urgent need for additional time to complete our mission responsibly.

Maryland's Unique Position and Responsibility

Maryland has been a pioneer in psychedelic science since the 1950s, with Johns Hopkins leading groundbreaking research that has shaped global understanding of these compounds. This history and tradition positions us to lead rather than follow. We are uniquely well-positioned to translate lessons learned from other states into a responsible, resident-centered, evidence based policy that leads national access models rather than simply reacting to or replicating them. The Task Force has already invested over 700 hours of expert volunteer time. We have done the hard work of building consensus, reviewing evidence, analyzing models, and developing a comprehensive framework. Now we need the time to develop regulation recommendations to help lay the foundation for our Pathway Forward plan.

The Landscape Is Rapidly Evolving

As noted in our reports, the Task Force does not support delaying state action pending future federal approval. Due in part to the fact that despite federal restrictions and the absence of FDA-approved options, clinical and public interest in psychedelic-assisted therapy is surging nationwide:

- The FDA has designated psilocybin a "breakthrough therapy," acknowledging its exceptional therapeutic potential for treatment-resistant depression
- The Department of Defense is actively funding psychedelic research specifically for military service members and veterans
- Oregon, Colorado, and New Mexico have already enacted state-level regulated psychedelic access models, offering valuable lessons learned
- Washington, D.C. has decriminalized psychedelics, creating an unmonitored market that lacks consumer protections

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- New Jersey just made history on January 20, 2026, when Governor Phil Murphy signed the Psilocybin Behavioral Health Access and Therapy Pilot Program into law, allocating \$6 million for psilocybin trials at three hospitals across the state with an 11-member advisory board to oversee implementation (PRWeb, January 2026)
- The current presidential administration has taken an assertive stance on advancing psychedelics, leaving Maryland with a time-limited opportunity to tailor local policies before federal standards are imposed

The Devastating Reality: Veteran Suicide Crisis

Maryland is home to approximately 360,000 veterans and another 100,000 active duty service members. Approximately 7.6% of adults who live in Maryland are veterans. The majority of veterans are between the age of 35-54 and we are home to a more diverse veteran population than that of the national average.

According to the VA's 2025 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, 17.5 veterans die by suicide every single day in the United States, that's 6,398 veteran suicides in 2023 alone (VA News, February 2026). If you add in opioid related deaths this number more than doubles to 44 veterans a day. As a combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, I have lost too many brothers and sisters in arms to this **preventable** epidemic.

The most common risk factors identified among veterans who died by suicide were pain (53.8%), sleep problems (51.4%), and increased healthcare use (VA Annual Report, 2024). Among veterans with mental health diagnoses who died by suicide: 64% had depression, 43% had anxiety disorders, 40% had PTSD, and 32% had alcohol use disorder (RAND Corporation, May 2025).

The Human Cost of Inaction

Through my work with both the Task Force and Veterans Initiative 22, I see daily the desperation of veterans seeking alternatives when conventional treatments fail. Currently, veterans are flying overseas with organizations like Heroic Hearts Project to access psychedelic-assisted therapy in countries like Mexico, Peru, and Costa Rica. While these organizations sponsor their veteran participants, other veterans who do not partake or qualify for these special programs are spending thousands of dollars and traveling thousands of miles, and each and everyone of them are taking significant personal and professional risks, all because they cannot access these potentially life-saving psychedelic treatments at home.

These warriors, who served our nation with honor, should not have to leave U.S. soil to access evidence-based mental health care.

Why an Extension Is Essential

Crafting recommended regulations for the proposed Ensemble Model responsibly requires significant additional work in 2027. With the extension, our Task Force will work to:

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- Carefully craft regulatory approaches that ensure safe, responsible, and affordable access
- Learn from early-adopter states like Oregon (which has identified important lessons about pricing, accessibility, and integration with existing healthcare), Colorado, New Mexico, and New Jersey, avoiding their pitfalls while incorporating their successes into our own pathway forward access models
- Center equity and accessibility in our framework, ensuring veterans, first responders, underserved communities, and those Marylander most in need can access these therapies
- Build robust safety protocols that protect vulnerable populations while maximizing therapeutic benefit
- Establish Maryland as a national leader in evidence-based psychedelic policy, building on our state's unparalleled legacy in psychedelics

Without the extension, this critical foundational work cannot be completed.

The Difference It Makes

- Public safety incidents that undermine confidence in these therapies vs. demonstrated safety records that build trust
- Accessibility only for the affluent vs. equitable access for all Marylanders, especially veterans and underserved communities
- Regulatory chaos and market instability vs. clear frameworks that enable responsible business development
- Missing opportunities to help thousands of Marylanders vs. establishing Maryland as the gold standard for psychedelic policy

As someone who serves in academia, policy development, and veteran advocacy, I can attest that not extending this process would be a disservice to Maryland residents. The stakes are too high for the veterans who die by suicide every day in America and for the thousands of Marylanders with treatment-resistant depression, PTSD, chronic pain, and substance use disorders. These groups in particular, along with all Maryland citizens, deserve a system designed for their safety and success.

I respectfully urge you to support HB0427 and grant the Task Force the time necessary to fulfill its mandate and complete its mission responsibly.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

Shanetha Marable-Lewis, MS

Task Force on the Responsible Use of Natural Psychedelic Substances, Chair Reg and Gov Committee

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