



OFFICE OF THE STATE'S ATTORNEY FOR BALTIMORE CITY

HB 171 Support

January 27th, 2026

The Honorable Sandy Bartlett
Chair, Judiciary Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Support of HB 171 – Criminal Law - Drug Trafficking Crime - Definition

Dear Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing to express strong support for HB 171 on behalf of the Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City. This bill addresses a critical gap in our law enforcement and criminal justice process. At its heart, it is a gun bill. This bill intends to ensure that the most grave perpetrators of violence in our communities face accountability.

By changing the definition of "Drug Trafficking Crime" to include misdemeanor charges or a conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor in violation of § 5-602(B)(1) and § 5-603(B), we are ensuring that anyone distributing drugs with a firearm is held accountable. Legislation that has decriminalized cannabis related crimes over the years has been essential to address systemic and structurally racist policies in Baltimore City, however, demoting criminal cannabis charges to misdemeanors has left a gap in combating drug traffickers, and has inhibited the ability of law enforcement and prosecutors to hold accountable individuals who hold firearms while distributing cannabis.

Under current legislation, an individual can drive around your neighborhood with vast quantities of cannabis and a firearm and only be charged with two misdemeanor crimes. If that same individual were holding a small bottle of fentanyl pills and a firearm, that individual would be charged with a drug trafficking crime and face a minimum of 5 years, up to 20 years. The danger we are trying to address with this legislation is the firearm. Holding criminal dealers accountable and removing dangerous weapons from our streets is an essential step in keeping Marylanders safe.

Despite the changes in cannabis legislation, an underground economy for cannabis still exists, and our prosecutors still see cannabis as a key factor in a lot of homicide cases. This is partially



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because there is not an appropriate level of accountability when dealers carry firearms. Help us take more guns off the street by passing this legislation.

I urge you to give a favorable report on HB 171. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Matias C. Cacheiro
Deputy Director of Government Affairs
Office of the State's Attorney for Baltimore City