

**Cannabis Public Health Advisory Council Legislative Meeting -Minutes  
Tuesday, February 3, 2026 · 3:00 – 4:00pm**

**Members Present:**

Dr. Deondra Asike  
Karrissa Miller  
Dr. Elizabeth Kromm  
Dawn Berkowitz  
Jason Semanoff  
Arinze Ifekauche  
Dr. Nishant Shah  
Audrey Johnson

**Members Not Present:**

Dr. Madhumi Mitra  
Dr. David Gorelick  
Dr. Leigh Vinocur  
Jocelyn Bratton-Payne  
Sen. Benjamin Kramer  
Martin Proulx  
Christine Nizer  
Del. Terri L Hill

**MDH Members Present:**

Erin Portillo  
Dana Moncrief  
Kate Natafgi  
Alexandra Nowalk

**LRC- Cannabis Staff Present:**

Mathew Swinburne  
George Townsend

**Members from Public:**

None.

## 1. Open Meeting. 3:00 PM.

- a. The meeting was called to order by Dr. Deondra Asike, Council Chair, at 3:00 PM on Tuesday, February 17, 2026.
- b. Kate Natafji took a roll call; 8 members were present. No quorum was reached.
- c. Mr. Swinburne noted that upcoming bill introduction deadlines (Senate: 2/9/26; House: 2/13/26) may result in a flurry of new legislative activity.
- d. Members were encouraged to provide feedback on the pre-meeting materials and workflow improvements designed to support high-quality legislative discussions.

## 2. Review/Discussion of Pending Legislation

### a. HB 640- Advisory Council Membership

This departmental bill from the Department of Budget and Management proposes removing the Secretary of Agriculture (or designee) from the Advisory Council. The Legislative Workgroup recommended no position, consistent with prior discussion. No additional comments were raised.

### b. SB 439 – Employment Protections for Fire and Rescue Public Safety Employees

The Council discussed a bill providing employment protections for firefighters, EMTs, paramedics, and related public safety personnel who are certified medical cannabis patients. The legislation would prohibit discrimination based solely on medical cannabis certification or positive metabolite testing, while still allowing employers to take action if an employee is impaired at work or using cannabis on duty. It includes carveouts for compliance with federal law and requires reporting if an employee is impaired while working. The bill previously passed the Senate (31–13) but did not advance in the House; Howard County has adopted similar protections locally.

Council discussion addressed whether the bill aligns with the Council's public health charge, considered employment as a social determinant of health, compared cannabis to other potentially impairing prescription medications, and noted the shift from broad to occupation-specific protections in similar legislation. The council ultimately took no position, because it was viewed as outside the Council's public health scope. Last session, the Council took no position, potentially due to statutory scope considerations, and no vote was taken due to lack of quorum.

c. HB 622 – Cannabis Administration (Micro-Dispensaries & Cannabis Agent Training)

The Council reviewed a departmental bill from the Maryland Cannabis Administration that includes two main components. First, it increases the employee cap for micro-dispensaries from 10 to 20, primarily to support social equity licensees and operational viability statewide. Second, it revises the “Responsible Vendor Training,” renaming it “Cannabis Agent Training” and shifting from retail-specific statutory requirements to broader, license-type–tailored training, while maintaining public health and safety standards. The Council had previously discussed potential support for the bill, but no action was taken due to lack of quorum.

d. HB 544- Vehicle Laws - Cannabis Use in Motor Vehicle With Minor Occupant - Prohibition

The Council discussed a bill prohibiting smoking, vaping, or consuming cannabis in a motor vehicle when a minor is present, with violations subject to up to one year of imprisonment and/or a \$1,000 fine. Existing Maryland law already restricts drivers from consuming cannabis (up to \$500 fine) and passengers from smoking cannabis (up to \$25 fine). The Council had submitted a Letter of Information on the bill in the prior session. Opposition last year included the ACLU of Maryland and the Maryland/DC Society of Addiction Medicine, citing concerns about disproportionate enforcement and the public health effectiveness of criminal penalties. Members considered whether to resubmit the Letter of Information or change the Council’s position. One member expressed support for maintaining the Letter of Information; no formal action was taken due to lack of quorum.

**3. Public Comment**

No members of the public were present.

**4. Adjournment- 3:34 pm.**

With no quorum and no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:34 PM.