

**Cannabis Public Health Advisory Council Legislative Meeting -Minutes
Tuesday, February 17, 2026 · 3:00 – 4:00 PM**

Members Present:

Dr. Deondra Asike
Dr. David Gorelick
Jocelyn Bratton-Payne
Dr. Leigh Vinocur
Karrissa Miller
Dr. Elizabeth Kromm
Dawn Berkowitz
Jason Semanoff
Audrey Johnson

Members Not Present:

Sen. Benjamin Kramer
Martin Proulx
Del. Terri L Hill
Dr. Nishant Shah
Arinze Ifekauche
Christine Nizer

MDH Members Present:

Erin Portillo
Dana Moncrief
Kate Natafji
Sara Demetriou
Snehal Gawhale
Alexandra Nowalk
Pamela Williams

Members from Public:

Erin Hopwood
Tabatha Robinson

1. Open Meeting. 3:03 PM.

- a. The meeting was called to order by Dr. Deondra Asike, Council Chair, at 3:03 PM on Tuesday, February 17, 2026
- b. Kate Natafji took a roll call; at the time of attendance, only 7 members were present, falling short of a quorum. An additional 2 members joined the meeting following attendance, giving a quorum of 9 members.

2. Legislative Updates:

Ms. Annie Carver of LRC- Cannabis confirmed that the House bill filing deadline was Friday. House Bill (HB) 1519 was filed shortly before the deadline. She clarified that bills filed after the deadline are referred to the Rules and Nominations Committee and are not guaranteed a hearing.

The Senate version of similar legislation has already been introduced as Senate Bill (SB) 594. Ms. Carver noted that the two bills are not identical but share several provisions.

3. SB 594 Overview:

Ms. Carver provided an overview of SB 594, explaining that the bill would define “therapeutic or medical claims” in cannabis advertising, remove existing prohibitions on advertising that “indirectly targets” individuals under age 21 or that is attractive to minors, and modify provisions related to exterior signage. Members expressed concern about eliminating the “indirect targeting” language, citing research linking youth exposure to cannabis advertising with earlier initiation of use and a greater risk of developing cannabis use disorder. The discussion also addressed the role of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in regulating implicit and explicit health claims, the potential weakening of Maryland’s consumer protection standards if implicit claims are no longer covered, and preliminary findings suggesting that most regulated cannabis states prohibit advertising that directly and indirectly targets minors, pending further verification.

4. Overview of HB 1519 (Cannabis Reform and Opportunity Act)

Ms. Carver presented HB 1519, sponsored by Delegates Amprey and Vogel and assigned to the House Economic Matters Committee, with a hearing scheduled for March 4, 2026. She explained that the bill includes a positive enforcement provision increasing fines for unlicensed THC sales from \$5,000 to \$10,000 and clarifying that each individually packaged product constitutes a separate violation. However, members focused much of their discussion on the bill’s advertising-related provisions, which would define therapeutic and medical claims by limiting them to explicit claims only, remove the prohibition on advertising that indirectly targets individuals under age 21, and repeal Maryland’s outdoor cannabis advertising ban. Concerns were raised about the removal of indirect targeting protections, the narrowing of therapeutic claim definitions, and

the repeal of the outdoor advertising ban—particularly the allowance of advertising within 500 feet of schools, childcare centers, playgrounds, parks, libraries, places of worship, and substance use treatment facilities. Members also discussed the broader public health implications of increased youth exposure to cannabis advertising and noted the bill’s exclusion of colleges and universities from the definition of secondary education.

5. Letter of Support- HB 622

The Council reviewed a draft Letter of Support for HB 622, which addresses training requirements for cannabis business employees. Discussion highlighted findings from the 2024 Maryland Medical Cannabis Patient Survey, involving approximately 13,000 respondents, underscoring patients’ significant reliance on dispensary agents for education and the importance of standardized, state-based training for retail, cultivation, and manufacturing staff. Dr. Vinocur moved to approve the Letter of Support as presented, with Dr. Gorelick seconding the motion. The vote passed by voice, with the majority in favor, none opposed, and Jason Semanoff abstaining; Jocelyn Bratton-Payne confirmed her support via chat.

6. Letter of Opposition – SB 594

The Council reviewed a draft letter opposing SB 594, with discussion focusing on strengthening language related to FTC regulation of implicit health claims, verifying research on advertising restrictions in other states, and ensuring references and formatting were correct. Dr. Gorelick moved to approve the letter, contingent on verification of the referenced research and minor edits, and the motion was seconded by Karrissa Miller. The vote passed with a majority in favor, including confirmation from Jocelyn Bratton-Payne via chat, none opposed, and Jason Semanoff abstaining.

7. Letter of Opposition- HB 1519

Members agreed to draft a Letter of Opposition to HB 1519, incorporating previously approved language on indirect targeting and therapeutic claims, relevant text from last year’s outdoor advertising opposition letter, and additional references to college campuses as environments with significant populations under age 21. Dr. Gorelick moved to draft and submit the letter, with the motion seconded by Dr. Vinocur and carried by majority vote, with no opposition or abstentions recorded. Dr. Vinocur agreed to prepare the draft, and Dr. Gorelick will provide edits.

8. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

9. Adjourn. 3:53 PM.

Citing no more items on the agenda for the day, Dr. Asike asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Vinocur motioned to adjourn, Dr. Gorelick seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned.