

**Cannabis Public Health Advisory Council Legislative Meeting -Minutes
Tuesday, February 24, 2026 · 3:00 – 4:00pm**

Members Present:

Dr. Deondra Asike
Dr. David Gorelick
Dr. Leigh Vinocur
Karrissa Miller
Martin Proulx
Dawn Berkowitz
Dr. Nishant Shah
Arinze Ifekauche
Audrey Johnson

Members Not Present:

Jocelyn Bratton-Payne
Sen. Benjamin Kramer
Del. Terri L Hill
Dr. Elizabeth Kromm
Christine Nizer
Jason Semanoff

MDH Members Present:

Erin Portillo
Dana Moncrief
Kate Natafji
Alexandra Nowalk

LRC- Cannabis Staff Present:

Mathew Swinburne
George Townsend
Annie Carver

Members from Public:

Nina Fergus

1. Open Meeting. 3:01 PM.

- a. The meeting was called to order by Dr. Deondra Asike, Council Chair, at 3:03 PM on Tuesday, February 24, 2026.
- b. Kate Natafji took a roll call; Only 7 members were present at the time of roll call, which does not constitute a quorum. An additional two members joined the meeting following roll call, which then constituted a quorum of 9.

2. Review/Discussion of Pending Legislation

Dr. Asike provided an update on recent legislative activity, reporting that the council's Letter of Opposition to Senate Bill 594, addressing cannabis advertising, had been submitted to the Senate Finance Committee ahead of the scheduled hearing on Thursday, February 26. She also noted that the Council's letter of support for House Bill 622 had been submitted internally, and no new bills had been filed since the previous meeting. The Council is currently awaiting crossover day for further legislative developments.

The discussion then turned to House Bill 1519, which builds on SB 594 and adds provisions regarding outdoor advertising. Dr. Asike offered to share relevant slides to refresh participants on the bill's contents. Mathew Swinburne explained that two public health groups would be submitting written testimony and testifying orally in opposition. Their concerns include limiting therapeutic and medical claims to only explicit statements, addressing indirect targeting of minors under 21, and regulating outdoor cannabis advertising near child-focused locations. Additional testimony from the Maryland Society of Addiction Medicine would address provisions related to non-news interviews and social media presentations by dispensary representatives.

Council members discussed outreach efforts to ensure legislators were informed of the Council's position. Dr. Asike shared that she personally sent the letter and supporting bullet points to Senator Kramer, although she had not yet received a response. Participants also discussed possible avenues for communicating with his staff and through Maryland Department of Health channels.

Attention then shifted to reviewing the submitted letter of opposition to HB 1519. Dr. Asike invited questions and feedback. With no suggested edits, a motion to approve the letter was made and seconded by Dr. Shah.

The vote passed with five approvals and four abstentions, the latter primarily from state agency-employed members. All governor-appointed, non-state members voted in favor.

Following the vote, Dr. Asike and David Gorelick led a discussion on strategies for more proactive legislative engagement in future sessions. Ideas included strengthening relationships with legislators, engaging early in bill drafting to

provide public health expertise, and coordinating with professional organizations such as the Maryland Society of Addiction Medicine, Maryland Psychiatric Society, and MedChi's public health subcommittee. These steps are intended to allow the Council to contribute evidence-based input before bills are formally introduced.

Dr. Asike thanked Council members for their dedication throughout the session, acknowledging the commitment required to meet regularly and monitor multiple bills. She encouraged ongoing communication and input as the legislative session progresses.

3. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

4. Adjourn. 3:31 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 the meeting, Dr. Shah seconded the motion.