



Virginia Society of Addiction Medicine

A Chapter of American Society of Addiction Medicine

OFFICERS

President
Jonathan C. Lee, MD
President-Elect
Alta DeRoo, MD
Secretary
Debra O'Beirne, MD
Treasurer
James Thompson, MD

February 10, 2020

The Honorable Adam P. Ebbin
Senator, District 30
Senate of Virginia
900 East Main Street
Pocahontas Building, Room E-520
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Conditional support for SB2

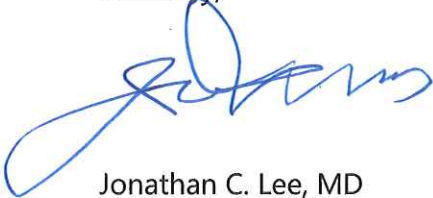
Dear Senator Ebbin and sponsors of SB2,

On behalf of the Virginia Society of Addiction Medicine (VASAM), the medical specialty society representing physicians and clinicians in Virginia who specialize in the treatment of addiction, we would like to take this opportunity to provide our conditional support for SB2, which would decriminalize possession of marijuana. While we support the effort to decriminalize substance use, we believe that Virginians would be better served if decriminalization was linked to contingencies that direct individuals to substance use disorder screening and treatment, as appropriate. Because we believe that Virginia should use this opportunity to steer patients towards treatment, we respectfully request that SB2 be amended to include referral to substance use disorder screening and treatment, as appropriate, as a contingency for civil possession offenses.

As outlined in the American Society of Addiction Medicine [Public Policy Statement on Marijuana, Cannabinoids, and Legalization](#), VASAM supports the "decriminalization of marijuana, which would reduce penalties for marijuana possession for personal use to civil offenses linked to contingencies, such as mandated referral to clinical assessment, educational activities, and, when indicated, formal treatment for addiction or other substance-related disorders." While SB2 takes a commendable step towards mitigating the harmful impacts of criminalizing substance use, Virginia should use this opportunity to direct individuals to substance use disorder screening and treatment as appropriate. Other states, such as Rhode Island and Maryland, have paired decriminalization with drug education or assessment for substance use disorder and referral to substance use treatment.¹ We encourage the Senate to follow this model and help connect Virginians to needed evaluation and treatment services.

VASAM shares the state of Virginia's goal of redirecting patients with addiction away from the criminal justice system and instead towards treatment. We applaud this decriminalization effort and respectfully encourage the sponsors to strengthen the bill by including pathways to access assessment and treatment. Please do not hesitate to contact VASAM if we can be of any assistance. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan C. Lee', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Jonathan C. Lee, MD
jlee@farleycenter.com
757-565-0106

CC

The Honorable Tommy Norment
The Honorable Joe Morrissey
The Honorable Jennifer Boysko
The Honorable Siobhan Dunnavant
The Honorable Lynwood Lewis
The Honorable Louise Lucas
The Honorable Bill Stanley
The Honorable Kaye Kory

ⁱ See, e.g., Maryland Statutes Title 5, Subtitle 6, §5-601; Rhode Island Statutes 21-28-1.01 et seq.