
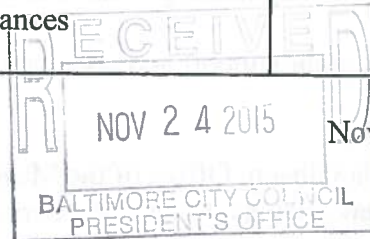


F R O M	Name & Title	Leana Wen, M.D., M.Sc. Health Commissioner <i>Leana Wen</i>	Health Department	
	Agency Name & Address	Health Department 1001 E. Fayette Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201	MEMO	
	Subject	15-0584 - Psychoactive Substances		

To: President and Members
of the City Council
409 City Hall



November 16, 2015

The Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD) is pleased to have the opportunity to review City Council Bill 15-0584 Psychoactive Substances. Baltimore City must take a stand against psychoactive substances, commonly known as synthetic drugs, and commit to keeping these dangerous products away from our youth, off our streets and out of our city! Synthetic drugs are a growing crisis in Baltimore City and around the country. These life threatening products are manufactured for abuse and pose serious health risks to Baltimore City residents - especially our youth. **BCHD supports this bill and strongly encourages the Committee and the Council to report the bill favorably.**

Synthetic drugs are man-made chemical compounds that claim to mimic the effects of marijuana and amphetamines. Marketed as “safe” or “legal” alternatives to street drugs, synthetic drugs are often labeled “not for human consumption” in order to avoid Food and Drug Administration regulatory oversight. In response to the efforts by federal and state legislators to outlaw the chemicals in these psychoactive substances, chemists immediately reconfigure the specific substances that were prohibited to produce “new” versions of these synthetic drugs.

These substances are most popular among young people. Nationally, one in nine 12th graders reported using synthetic drugs in the past year. Of the illicit substances used by high-school seniors, they rank second only to marijuana. The total number of synthetic drugs available is also growing. In 2012, 158 new synthetic drugs were identified. In Baltimore City, emergency physicians are reporting a marked increase in the number of people coming to the ER after use. These are mostly young people who come in completely unresponsive with severe symptoms.

This legislation is needed to provide civil and administrative penalties against those who distribute these products. The bill would impose fines up to \$1,000 per package for distributing synthetic drugs. Violators would also be at risk of losing their license to operate. We must commit to eradicating these products from our city and this bill will help in that effort.

To support this legislation, the Health Department is conducting a public health campaign against synthetic drugs. BCHD has coordinated with hospitals to facilitate reporting of suspected and confirmed synthetic drug overdoses to the Maryland Poison Center. We are conducting outreach to educate community members on the dangers of synthetic drugs and how they can be identified. We are also reaching out to retailers to educate them and encourage them to

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voluntarily commit to not selling these dangerous products and have arranged so that citizens can report retailers who do sell these products to 311.

We all must work together and commit to prohibit the distribution of synthetic drugs in our city. Together, we can make sure that Baltimore City is free from synthetic drugs and our youth are not exposed to these dangerous substances. BCHD encourages a favorable report of this bill and will be present at any hearing to answer questions.

Thank you for your support and attention to this matter.

cc: Angela Gibson, Office of the Mayor
Andrew Nicklas, Legislative Director, Department of Health