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Maryland Cannabis Administration Establishes State Reference Laboratory, First-in-the-nation for a Cannabis Regulatory Authority

Linthicum, Md. - The Maryland Cannabis Administration (MCA) announced today the opening of its cannabis reference laboratory. The laboratory will be responsible for auditing the results from independent testing laboratories to ensure accuracy, assisting with illicit product investigations, and determining standardized testing methods for the industry. Maryland joins only a handful of other jurisdictions with a cannabis reference laboratory, and it is the first reference laboratory in the country dedicated exclusively to cannabis oversight and managed by a state cannabis regulatory agency.

“As the cannabis industry grows in Maryland, the State is prioritizing data collection and analysis, and public health and product safety,” said MCA Director Will Tilburg. “The reference lab will contribute to the standardization of testing methods and data collection and help ensure that Maryland consumers have access to safe and compliant products.”

The Cannabis Reform Act, which was signed into law on May 3, 2023, requires MCA to establish and maintain a reference laboratory. With the assistance of the Moore-Miller Administration and the Maryland Department of General Services, MCA was able to secure the reference laboratory site and complete construction on an expedited timeline.

“The Maryland Department of General Services is pleased to support the Maryland Cannabis Administration’s Laboratory project. This initiative will provide the Cannabis Administration with a facility to test products and thus ensure public health and safety protocols are met,” said Maryland Department of General Services Secretary Atif Chaudhry. “The DGS Office of Real Estate worked on site evaluation and selection, negotiated the lease agreement, planned and designed the facility space, and oversaw the expedited buildout for the Maryland Cannabis Administration.”

The reference laboratory will help promote innovation and safety in the nascent industry. The responsibilities of the reference laboratory will include:

- Preparing, conducting and analyzing proficiency testing events for independent testing laboratories (ITL);
- Developing cannabis testing methodologies;
- Compliance testing on cannabis samples;

- Establishing and verifying standard operating procedures for ITLs;
- Developing and facilitating quality assurance and compliance controls for micro growers and micro processors;
- Remediate problems with registered independent testing laboratories and recommend administrative sanctions; and
- Test products for adverse event reporting, research, and other purposes deemed necessary by the MCA, including:
 - Licensed cannabis products produced and sold in accordance with this subtitle;
 - Unlicensed cannabis products produced or sold in violation of this subtitle;
 - Hemp-derived products; and
 - Any other products required to be tested for the public health or public safety of Maryland.

Additionally, identifying a location and designing a facility to meet the functional requirements was a critical part of the process.

“Cannabis testing requires very complex instrumentation and there wasn't a blueprint of how this process should be navigated however with our partnering agencies, we were able to create a layout that's efficient and will support our testing and equipment needs,” said MCA's Chief of Laboratory Services and Laboratory Director Michelle Sallin.

The MCA anticipates that the reference laboratory will be fully accredited by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) by March 2025.