

## **Support – SB821 – Boutique Licenses**

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Hippocratic Growth

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Madame Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony this afternoon. My name is Ashley Colen and I am the proud owner of Ash and Ember, and independent medical cannabis dispensary located on the eastern shore.

There is an issue with supply and demand in the medical cannabis industry. There is also an issue with minority and female representation in the industry. Senate Bill 821 seeks to right both of those wrongs and provide patients with a safer option for cannabis. This bill creates 10 “boutique” licenses to grow and process. These boutique licenses are smaller facilities, limited to 30,000sq ft that have a more thorough screening process for pesticide use. The bill creates a niche industry; an avenue for those who have been shut out of the industry to have the opportunity to participate. Senate Bill 821 will help us mitigate the supply issue while ensuring minority participation and safer product options for patients.

The legislature must intervene this legislative session to add more licenses to ensure minority inclusion in the Maryland cannabis market and the success of existing minority businesses such as independent dispensaries who are being systematically shut out by vertical integrated businesses, many of whom have multiple dispensaries.

There are 93,265 patients currently, and the MMCC receiving on average 175+ applications per day. The patient population is exploding in our state and has far surpassed original estimates and continues to climb. With not enough product in the state, its keeping prices high and driving people back to the black market. If you go to dispensaries that are owned by grows and processors, there is plenty of product in their inventory, but independent dispensaries that are supposed to be fed by those same grows are being starved out in an effort to push the dispensaries to failure in hopes their licenses go up for sale, a strategy seen performed by multi-state operators nationwide. Passing SB 821 would create an entirely new line of business; a niche industry designed to allow these small operations to grow high quality product for their own dispensary. This product would be safer. Patients would know that the cannabis had been grown with limited to no pesticides. Pesticides that have been tested for safety when consumed or inhaled, a level of testing that does not currently exist.

By supporting SB 821 you are giving minority and women owned businesses the opportunity to grow and process cannabis that is safe for human health and the environment. Please pass SB 821; give independent dispensaries the opportunity to cultivate and patients the opportunity to purchase safer medical cannabis.