



...working to legalize responsible adult use...

National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws

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House Health and Government Operations Committee

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Testimony of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws in Regard to: House Bill 416

I applaud members of the Committee for considering this important legislation and I urge you to vote ‘yes’ on House Bill 416 to establish the Medical Cannabis Business Development Fund to provide financial assistance to minority and women owned businesses.

For decades, many of Maryland’s most vulnerable and marginalized communities have disproportionately borne the greatest hardship and collateral consequences of the War on Drugs. Lawmakers must address this legacy by facilitating efforts to include these communities in the legal medical cannabis market. Further, licensing bodies should prioritize supporting small businesses and diversity over corporate greed.

Communities of color have disproportionately suffered for decades because of our racist enforcement of marijuana laws and that must be addressed in the age of marijuana regulation through policies such as the proposed Business Development Fund. Historically, African-Americans are arrested for violating marijuana possession laws at nearly four times the rates of whites, yet both ethnicities consume marijuana at roughly the same rates.

Specifically, the American Civil Liberties Union report, *The War on Marijuana In Black and White* (2013) concluded: “[O]n average, a Black person is 3.73 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than a white person, even though Blacks and whites use marijuana at similar rates. Such racial disparities in marijuana possession arrests exist in all regions of the country, in counties large and small, urban and rural, wealthy and poor, and with large and small Black populations. Indeed, in over 96% of counties with more than 30,000 people in which at least 2% of the residents are Black, Blacks are arrested at higher rates than whites for marijuana possession.”¹

¹ <https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/aclu-thewaronmarijuana-rel2.pdf>

Findings in this same report showed that in Maryland, racial disparities in marijuana possession arrest rates rose 44% between 2001-2010. In places like Baltimore City, MD, black Americans are almost six times as likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites.

For these reasons I urge members of the committee to vote 'yes' on HB 416.