

Written Testimony
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Good afternoon. My name is Bruce Branch, Executive Director of the Maryland Business and Clergy Partnership which represents more than 500 businesses and churches throughout the state of Maryland. To the esteemed members of this body who sit in judgment on one of the most important pieces of legislation during this session which shall define our past and shape the future for hundreds of African American business owners seeking entry into the lucrative medical cannabis industry, I rise to announce my support for House Bill 1449 which will create an open marketplace for qualified processors and growers in a rapidly growing industry that currently lacks minority business participation I believe that individuals on both sides of the aisle would agree that the free enterprise system is the best system and the basis for our nation's growth and sustainability and this bill will do just that. The challenges faced by the Commission in doling out licenses for growers and processors in an equitable fashion have been well-documented. This is an attempt to take favoritism and cronyism out of the process and open it up to each qualified applicant who applied during the last round of applications. .

The bill before you today provides for equality under the law for all people and represents one of the most clear cut opportunities we are likely to have to declare our faith in the principles that shaped the Constitution of this great nation and state. It

provides a legal basis to eliminate attacks on the most subtle, most pervasive and most institutionalized form of prejudice that exists – a lack of economic opportunity. In this day and age discrimination in many areas of business are so widespread that it seems normal, natural and right and today you have an opportunity to take a stand and right a major wrong in a flawed system for the dispensing of licenses. It is time we act to assure full equality of opportunity to those residents of Maryland who suffer the restrictions of a lack of hope, a lack of faith in government and to date a lack of opportunity. Progress never comes through boundless liberalism nor static conservatism, but at the critical mass of mutual survival. It takes two wings to fly. Whether you are a hawk or a dove, you are just a bird living in the same environment, in the same world. The Bible teaches that when lions and lambs lie down together, none will be afraid, and there will be peace in the valley. It sounds impossible. Lions eat lambs. Lambs sensibly flee from lions. Yet even lions and lambs find common ground. Why? Because neither lions nor lambs want the forest to catch on fire. Neither lions nor lambs want acid rain to fall or for the Coronavirus to spread. If lions and lambs can find common ground, surely we can as well in the state of Maryland. The only time that we win is when we come together. History has shown us that full inclusion is a win-win for everyone. Prohibition didn't work in the Garden of Eden. Adam ate the apple.

Opportunity has shown itself to be the great equalizer in the elimination of barriers. A few years ago, an aspiring basketball player in Wilmington, North Carolina was cut in ninth grade and in the 10th grade by his high school coach. He was told he wasn't good enough. He wasn't tall enough. The young basketball player didn't give up. He kept coming back as many of us have here today. We have faced many obstacles and challenges for the past five years during the licensing process, but we have remained tenacious and steadfast in our belief that we are qualified and well-equipped to manage and operate licensing and growing facilities. Well that basketball player who had been told he wasn't good enough finally received a chance to play after years of sitting on the sidelines. When he finally got in the game, he exceeded all expectations. Today, Michael Jordan is widely recognized as the Greatest Player of All-Time. That only happened because somebody gave him an opportunity and he received a chance to play in the game. Today, we implore you, let African Americans play in the game by opening up the licensing process and the state of Maryland will be that shining example for all the nation to see when it comes to shaping and developing the Medical Cannabis Industry.

Thank you