

## Testimony of Lisa Ellis

Maryland Resident, MDOT Certified Women-owned Business, &  
Member of the African American Cannabis Association

In support of HB1449 with Amendments

February 28, 2020

As stated in previous testimonies, minority inclusion is STILL an issue in Maryland's medical marijuana program. The state's demonstrated history of discrimination against African Americans, women, and other people of color was confirmed in the Disparity Study ordered by Governor Larry Hogan, Jr. April 27, 2017. A year later, in 2018 consultants found **significant statistical disparities** to institute grounds to consider race in awarding medical marijuana licenses. Yet, two years later there are no new growers and the process is mired in litigation, and federal investigations.

The cannabis program was packaged and sold to voters as a win-win for all Marylanders, alluring to hopes and promises of a healthier medication, an alternative to opioids, and equity ownership opportunities for minority business enterprises in this new billion dollar industry. Given Maryland's devastating history of injustices against Black people, lawmakers promised a prosperous industry of inclusion. In 2016, 61% of voters supported those promises that never came.

In the mist of many political hoodwinks, outside pressures initiated by the Maryland Black Caucus, the courts, African Americans, and other minority groups, created the opportunity for the second round of licenses to be issued by the Commission and we will not settle for less.

As I look at the track record of broken promises and the hard road traveled by people who look like me, I will continue to stand with to my community and colleagues in the fight against discrimination until access is opened in this legislative session. I encourage you to support HB 1449 with the following amendments, as previously submitted by the African American Cannabis Association:

1. Remove the caps on licenses for growers and processors. HB1449, page 2 Line #13 caps the number of grower licenses to 22.
2. Instruct MMCC to issue stage one pre-approval to qualified May 24, 2019 applicants who submitted proof of documented payment.

Thank you for your time and once more, I encourage you to support HB 1449 with Amendments including those referenced herein.