



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 837 – Cannabis Reform Senate Finance Committee March 23, 2022

SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT

**Donna S. Edwards
President
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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support HB 837 – Cannabis Reform. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 340,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

When the voters of Maryland approve of the legalization of cannabis, HB 837 will be necessary to safely enact the will of the people, providing for some of the appropriate measures for a seamless transition. The legislation includes – among other things – a baseline study of existing cannabis use in Maryland, the creation of a Cannabis Business Assistance Fund to assist new cannabis entrepreneurs, the creation of the Cannabis Public Health Fund to help mitigate against any public health issues related to legalization, and some cursory first steps in addressing the inequities of past cannabis-related arrests, prosecutions, convictions, and imprisonment.

HB 837 is a great first step in the regulation of cannabis, should the voters approve of its legalization this coming fall. However, it is lacking in the protection of workers within this – soon to be – thriving sector of the economy. With legalization and regulation of a brand-new industry, businesses will fill the market need for cannabis products, bringing new jobs to fulfill demand. It is imperative that whenever we have the opportunity to create new jobs, we ensure workers have a voice in that process. Those who create the entirety of the value of any business should have a say in their own future.

Therefore, we support the following friendly amendment to HB 837, that will provide the workers in this new industry a level playing field by which they can exercise their rights in the workplace:

On p. 6, after line 19, please insert:

(2). Grants from the Fund for small, minority-owned, or women-owned businesses can only be awarded to applicants who submit an attestation signed by a bona fide labor organization stating that the applicant has entered into a labor peace agreement with such bona fide labor organization.

Moreover, when the General Assembly writes the full regulation and licensure of recreational cannabis businesses, Maryland's unions ask that you include strong Labor Peace language within that legislation, as well. California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia have Labor Peace language in their recreational cannabis legislation, and those states are enjoying a boom in recreational cannabis business license applications and business profits. Far from being a hindrance, Labor Peace provides a level of security for businesses and workers by creating continuity across the industry.

For these reasons we ask for a favorable report, with the adoption of the amendment above on HB 837.