

**Testimony in Support with Amendments of HB 0837
Cannabis Reform
February 10, 2022**

To: Hon. Luke Clippenger, Chair, and members of the House Judiciary Committee

From: Kayla Mock, Political Organizer
United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Local 400

Chair Clippenger and members of the Judiciary Committee, I appreciate the chance to share my testimony on behalf of our over 10,000 members in Maryland, working on the front lines of the ongoing pandemic in grocery, retail, food distribution, law enforcement, and health care. Through collective bargaining, our members raise the workplace standards of wages, benefits, safety, and retirement for all workers. Union members are critical to the addressing inequality and uplifting the middle class.

We support HB 0837 with amendments.

We are excited Maryland is poised to become the 32nd state, plus Washington, D.C., to either legalize or decriminalize adult use cannabis, especially since 67% of Marylanders are supportive of legislation to do so. We appreciate the hard work and thoughtfulness that has gone into this legislation and understand the extreme complexity that comes with adult use cannabis reform.

The United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), represents tens of thousands of cannabis workers across the United States in dispensaries, labs, kitchens, manufacturing, grow facilities, and more.

The UFCW wants a bill that sets up an equitable system of legalization and regulation centering around social equity prioritizing impacting communities and community reinvestment, and labor peace agreements.

A "Labor peace agreement" is an agreement between a marijuana establishment and a bona fide labor organization protecting the state's proprietary interests by, at a minimum, prohibiting the labor organization from engaging in picketing, work stoppages, or boycotts against the cannabis establishment. A "Bona fide labor organization" is a labor union representing, or is actively seeking to represent, cannabis workers.

Labor peace agreements help support a fair process for workers to decide whether they would like union representation without intimidation or retaliation by employers. The Economic Policy Institute estimates U.S. employers spend nearly \$340 million each year on advisors that conduct “‘union vulnerability tests’ and provide companies with important recommendations for crushing union drives at their companies.” Labor peace agreements in cannabis licensure will ensure workers can choose to form a union in a neutral environment, without employer interference.

The cannabis industry is fast growing and a multibillion-dollar industry, and it is important to ensure workers obtain a fair share of the economic growth. The “Ensuring the High Road in Cannabis” report by the Economic Policy Institute found that union representation in the cannabis industry was key to ensuring jobs were safer, better paying, and more likely to provide benefits like healthcare, paid leave, and fair scheduling. The report also found union representation could significantly increase cannabis worker wages, with cultivation workers making over \$7,000 more a year, processing workers could make more than \$8,700 more a year, and retail employees making \$3,000 more a year on average than non-unionized employees.

Labor peace agreements also address social equity issues, addressing inequity in the hardest hit communities from the “War on Drugs.” The EPI study also found people of color and women would enjoy a bigger wage boost from unionizing in the cannabis industry. For example, unionized cannabis workers of color in processing jobs earn 26.4% to 32.4% more than nonunion workers. “Unions offer a powerful mechanism for promoting greater racial equity in cannabis,” the report stated.

Labor peace agreements can also help ensure quality training for this new and emerging workforce, and safety regulations in these facilities. When workers have access to representation their ability to advocate training or additional education, is increased. Additionally, unionized workers are less likely to have workplace accidents because of safety regulations and enforcement by union representation. By requiring safe working conditions, labor peace agreements also protect the health and welfare of workers and consumers. A well-trained workforce can produce quality products that meet higher safety standards.

Social equity is an incredibly important piece of cannabis legalization, and we are appreciative of the pieces placed in this bill. We ask that labor peace agreements be included to promote social equity and ensure good sustainable jobs for Marylanders by requiring freedom of choice without interference, opening access for collective bargaining for wages, benefits, racial and gender equality and equal treatment, safe working conditions.

For all these reasons, we support HB 837 with amendments.

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