

# VETERANS INITIATIVE 22

## Because We C.A.R.E

### Testimony on Maryland Senate Bill 0215:

TO: Delegate C. T. Wilson Chair, House Members of the Economics Matters Committee

FROM: Shanetha Lewis, Veterans Initiative 22, Executive Director

DATE: 02/14/2025

BILL: HB0132

POSITION: **Unfavorable**

I write to express our organization's unfavorable position for HB0132, which seeks to regulate on-site cannabis consumption establishments and cannabis events

Veterans Initiative 22 is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that focuses on helping Veterans, Family and First Responders by providing resources, employment opportunities, and continuously advocating for rights and access to affordable cannabis and Veteran rights. VI 22 was named as such after the estimated 22 Veterans who commit suicide daily due to PTSD, and it is our organization's goal to bring national awareness to this tragedy, while also working to improve the lives of Veterans across the country.

We want to begin by expressing our unwavering support for the establishment of both on-site consumption lounges and cannabis events. I recognize and respect that this bill represents a vital step toward creating structured opportunities for safe and legal cannabis

ing goals of public safety and responsible use. However I do feel again that there is a lack of clarity in what are the "certain circumstances" that would permit those outside the approved social equity applicants to apply for a consumption lounge license. Our organization stands staunchly in support of INCLUDING veterans as part of the persons who can qualify as "social equity" and has found this lack of inclusion to be a travesty and affront to the former service members who sacrificed for this great country and then are denied inclusion into these social equity programs, especially in light of our current political landscape where the future existence of such programs as well as economic survival of non-profit organizations are in peril. Due to the ambiguity in the current language of the bill being proposed, as well as, within the current COMAR regulations regarding adult consumption, adult consumers and organizations that wish to hold private adult only events that allow adult consumption, are in a current state of confusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. I am confident that with the proposed amendments HB0132 or reintroduction of a new bill with the language proposed in our testimony, this legislation will better serve Maryland's cannabis community, both patients and adult consumers and the industry. Again I thank you for your time in reading my testimony and for your consideration of my position. Cannabis is medicine and unrestricted affordable access to cannabis improves and saves lives!

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use within the community, fostering equitable participation in the cannabis industry while prioritizing public health and safety. Also, based on further explanation and clarification by MCA and ATCC representatives that we have been given since the hearing for SB0215, our organization has adjusted parts of our testimony to reflect our better current understanding of the parameters to which the bill was formed, and respect the administration's approach under these restrictive guidelines. However, because of several factors outlined below, our organization sadly must oppose the bill in its current form, as we believe the inclusion of the amendments that I am about to propose would not be adopted and we would be left with regulatory framework that does not create an economically viable nor sustainable business structure for those who wish to operate consumption lounges, nor those who like my organization wish to hold cannabis events, and lastly, one that serves the medical cannabis patients in Maryland.

Please note our unfavorable **position** for this bill. For the following reasons:

- 1.) (b) Subject to the limitations in § 36–405 of this subtitle, a political subdivision 24 may:

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(2) prohibit or restrict the smoking or vaping of cannabis at on-site consumption establishments; [or]

This section of the bill is the primary reason we once again regrettably choose to oppose it, as it grants political subdivisions the authority to unnecessarily limit consumer choice by prohibiting or restricting the vaping or smoking of cannabis at on-site consumption establishments. By allowing local governments to impose such restrictions, the bill effectively limits consumption lounges to only edibles and drinks, disregarding the needs of individuals who prefer or require inhalation methods for faster onset and more precise dosing. This exclusion undermines the purpose of providing a safe and legal space for consumption, potentially driving consumers to unregulated areas. A truly equitable and effective policy should ensure that all responsible consumption methods, including vaping and outdoor smoking, are permitted to meet the diverse needs of those who consume cannabis for medicinal reasons.

2.) (H) (1) THE ADMINISTRATION SHALL CHARGE A \$500 FEE FOR EACH DAY 28 THAT A CANNABIS EVENT IS HELD.

I find the proposed fees for registering cannabis consumption events to be excessively high, creating significant economic barriers for businesses or organizations hosting smaller, consumption-friendly gatherings. Additionally, much of the language surrounding

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cannabis events seems to imply that such events are primarily recreational or “party-like” in nature. In reality, many of these gatherings are therapeutic in focus, emphasizing health, wellness, and community support. It is important that the framework acknowledges and accommodates the diverse purposes these events serve.

Additionally, I support the bill's emphasis on ensuring social equity by limiting applications for consumption lounge licenses to social equity applicants, as well as its safeguards to prohibit intoxicated patrons and underage access. These measures align with the overarch

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