

POSITION: SUPPORT SB 821

TESTIMONY OF JOSEPH GASKINS, PRESIDENT
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEDICAL CANNABIS ASSOCIATION
SB 821 – Hearing – March 4, 2020

Chair Kelley and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important issue. I also want to thank Senator Klausmeir for her sponsorship of this legislation. My name is Joseph Gaskins and I am president of the African American Medical Cannabis Commission.

Once again, I am here to support legislation that will create real opportunity for participation in Maryland's medical cannabis industry by our minority-owned and small businesses.

Minority inclusion in the Medical Cannabis Industry is still an issue.

You were convinced in 2018 that the industry-sponsored legislation that resulted in a handful of new licenses and a mandate to promote minority inclusion would address minority participation. Let me clear, I fought the 2018 legislation and supported a legislative agenda that is embraced by SB 821. I went to meetings too. I heard about deals and promises to cap licenses and impose a moratorium. I heard about the need to protect the growers whose plans weren't working and needed the moratorium, or they'd lose their shirts. And I heard that my people could wait. I have spent my career advancing opportunities for minority-owned businesses. When it comes to cannabis and minorities, Maryland has a dark history. Participation in the medical cannabis industry was promoted as making amends. That was just lip service.

We've been waiting a long time and are still standing at the door that you've locked.

SB 821 allows you to take a meaningful step to address minority and small business participation by employing Maryland's long-successful strategy of promoting minority inclusion in state industries using the MDOT MBE certification process to level the playing field.

SB 821 also helps to bring transparency to the minority and small business process. The current MMCC process is not transparent and has invited lawsuits and even a federal criminal investigation. This legislation provides specific statutory guidance that leaves little for manipulation of the application process.

The current license holders may try and oppose this legislation, but they should not. This bill creates a completely new line of business. Small, pesticide limited licenses. A niche industry that allows for the little guy to supply his own shop and supply that shop with safe product. These same license holders argue that promises were made in 2018 to ensure their financial success and their monopoly status. We should be for inclusion, not monopolies.

Please make real change and support SB 821.