



Date: February 28, 2020  
Committee: Health and Government Operations Committee  
Legislation: Testimony on [HB 1449](#): *Health- Medical Cannabis Reauthorization Act*  
Position: Support

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Chairwoman Pendergrass, Vice Chair Peña-Melnyk, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Kevin Ford, Jr. I am the founder of Uplift Maryland, and we SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS HB 1449 and request a FAVORABLE report by this committee. This bill removes the cap on medical cannabis grower and processor licenses in the State of Maryland, by authorizing the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission (MMCC) to review new applications on a rolling, first-come, first-serve basis.

At Uplift Maryland, we strive to increase diversity and inclusion within the emerging cannabis industry, ensuring our community has an opportunity to participate in the economy of the future. In 2018, we were awarded one of five grants from the Maryland Medical Cannabis Commission (MMCC) to develop and implement an education and business development program for minority business owners. Through that program, we trained approximately 10% of all applicants for grower and processor licenses in 2019. We are also currently contracted by the MMCC to develop curriculum for their Dispensary Agent Training Program. This bill would allow Uplift the opportunity to further its mission to “*end the stigma*” in our community.

HB 1449 is a giant leap in the right direction towards solving a problem that looms the cannabis industry nationwide: social equity. Minority participation in Maryland’s medical cannabis industry is unacceptably low at all levels. Gov. Hogan’s disparity study revealed that the state industry lacked representation of women and minority business owners, likely causing those groups to miss out on the economic opportunities available in the growing market for medical cannabis. Social equity isn’t just a Maryland issue it’s an American issue. It is our belief that the solution to social equity is fair and equitable opportunity for all who seek it.

Despite the push back and fear tactics presented by the opposition, HB 1449 will undoubtedly propel Maryland’s cannabis industry forward. Removing the cap on grower and processor licenses will have a positive effect on all industry stakeholders: patients will have better access to higher quality, more affordable medical cannabis products; minority and women entrepreneurs will have a fair opportunity to enter the market; current growers will be able to expand their growing capacity by allowing an amendment for management and operating agreements; dispensaries would be able to grow their own cannabis and no longer be at the disposal of the finite amount of current growers; more jobs for the community; and an increase revenue for the MMCC to successfully carry out their mission of ensuring medical cannabis is available to qualifying patients in a safe and effective manner.

Maryland is in a unique position to provide a model for success for social equity, when many States have failed trying to protect the interests of a few over the interests of many.

We strongly encourage this committee to vote favorably on HB 1449.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Ford, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kevin Ford, Jr.

CEO

Uplift Maryland