



# LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

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Date: March 4, 2021

Re: SB 708 - Cannabis – Legalization and Regulation

Position: SUPPORT

To: The Maryland Senate Finance Committee

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 708 today. Having spent my career with the Baltimore City and Maryland State Police Departments, I believe I have a responsibility to discuss the public safety impacts of the legalization and control of marijuana.

In addition to my public safety career, I am a speaker and the former Executive Director for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety and working toward healing police-community relations.

As Commander of the Bureau of Drug and Criminal Enforcement, I was dismayed to see scarce police resources spent on marijuana arrests. Every marijuana arrest took hours away from investigating homicides and attempted murders. We need our police to focus on the greatest threats to public safety -- and marijuana is not one of them.

In fact, I learned the hard way that arresting someone for selling marijuana makes things worse on the street. Every officer knows that an arrest does not stop the marijuana trade. Instead, it creates a job opening, tempting kids with an easy opportunity to make money. And it introduces young people into the justice system, where a felony charge will lock them out of employment, education, and housing opportunities. Our entire society loses every time another job opens up in the illegal marijuana trade.

Enforcing drug laws not only wastes the time of our officers and the potential of our youth, it also destroys community trust. You already know how devastating the effects of Freddie Gray's death in police custody have been -- one of the greatest implosions in police-community relations since Rodney King. Freddie Gray had been in and out of handcuffs [since age eighteen](#) for selling drugs. We cannot place all of the blame on the officers responsible for his death -- when we ask officers to fight a war against young people who sell drugs, some officers are going to treat them as enemies rather than as children of families in the community. By putting the marijuana trade in the hands of young people, we are setting ourselves up for tragedies that lay waste to community trust.

Without community trust, police cannot protect public safety. Since the killing of Freddie Gray in April 2015, [homicide rates in Baltimore](#) have been sky-high. When people do not trust the police, our detectives cannot close cases. We must protect police-community trust as one of our most valuable public safety resources, and our War on Drugs is front and center in destroying that trust.

I am proud to see my legislators supporting SB 708, which would put us on the right path by legalizing and regulating marijuana. This bill would stop the cycle of tempting young people to sell marijuana and then introducing them into the justice system, because it would move the marijuana trade from street corners and school parking lots to regulated dispensaries.

We are at a critical time for our state and nation. We need to do more to gain back the trust of the communities we took an oath to protect and serve. I believe that SB 708 is an important step forward to restore trust and improve public safety.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience in support of this bill.



Major Neill Franklin (Ret.)

Baltimore City and Maryland State Police Departments

Speaker and Executive Board Member, Law Enforcement Action Partnership