



March 4, 2021

The Honorable Delores Kelley
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

SB 708 - Cannabis – Legalization and Regulation - FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Kelley and Senate Finance Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti-sex worker policies. As a certified Overdose Response Program, Naloxone distributor, and syringe service program, we have provided essential health care services across the state for years. To supplement the life-saving services provided by us and dozens of harm reduction programs across the state, BHRC supports SB 708 - Cannabis – Legalization and Regulation.

BHRC supports SB708 and broader efforts to gain community reparation from over a century of harm. Over 145 years of criminalizing people - mostly Black people - who use drugs has devastated communities across the country. Maryland must prioritize the health, dignity, and safety of its residents, including systemic community healing after decades of over-policing and mass incarceration due to the war on drugs. The relationship between substance use, housing instability, incarceration, survival behavior, and racism are deeply intertwined. It is our Black community members who are most often subjected to this cycle of homelessness and incarceration, making up the majority of both homeless and incarcerated individuals in Maryland.

Adding to this incredible injustice and experiences of marginalization is the increasingly deadly overdose epidemic. During the first nine months of 2020, as the deadly COVID-19 pandemic flooded the U.S. and Maryland, drug and alcohol related intoxication deaths in Maryland reached a staggering 2,025 fatalities. Compared to the same period in 2019, overdose fatalities increased by over 35% among Black Marylanders.¹

In the midst of multiple intersecting public health crises, Marylanders deserve the modicum of relief that this bill provides by reducing policing, surveillance, and incarceration for cannabis possession. It is the least we can do to begin a path towards repair for unjust laws and community devastation -- waged in part by mass criminalization and the war on drugs. **We ask that the Senate Finance Committee give SB708 a favorable report.**

For more information about the Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition or our position, please contact our Director of Mobilization, Rajani Gudlavalleti at Rajani@BaltimoreHarmReduction.org.

¹Maryland Department of Health (Jan 2020). Unintentional Drug- and Alcohol-Related Intoxication Deaths* in Maryland Data update through 3rd quarter 2020.