



Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee

****Support****

HB 32 – Cannabis - Legalization and Regulation (Inclusion, Restoration, and Rehabilitation Act of 2021)

February 16, 2021

I would like to encourage the Judiciary Committee to support House Bill 32, entitled: “Cannabis -Legalization and Regulation (Inclusion, Restoration, and Rehabilitation Act of 2021).”

This bill is very much in line with the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), which guides Social Work practice. The NASW Code of Ethics states that social justice is one of the core values of the Social Work profession and that Social Workers should challenge social injustice and discrimination.

Given the racist origins of Cannabis prohibition, begun in 1937 to criminalize Latinx and African American citizens, ending Cannabis prohibition is an important step toward realizing a more just society. The disproportionate enforcement of Cannabis laws in Maryland, where African Americans are three times as likely to be arrested for Cannabis possession as whites, despite similar rates of use (www.marylandcannabispolicy.org), means that ending Cannabis prohibition is also combating institutional racism..

Social Workers should seek equality of opportunity for all people. The manner in which the tax revenue generated by HB32 will be allocated, with attention to racial and social justice, would advance this goal of the Social Work profession. HB32 will establish a Social Equity Fund, Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund, and endowments to Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Maryland. HB32 also includes provisions to encourage full participation in the legal Cannabis industry by those communities disproportionately criminalized and stigmatized by prohibition.

I can also provide some personal testimony about Cannabis prohibition. In 2009 I was arrested in Garrett County, MD for having one gram of Cannabis in my pocket. I was taken to jail for 15 hours before I was put in shackles and taken across the street to the Magistrate's office. I was charged for possession of “marijuana” and also “marijuana paraphernalia” for the cellophane it was wrapped in. I had to pay legal fees and had a criminal record for the next three years. I had to pay to have my record expunged. I do not believe that this response was appropriate, and it undermined my faith in, and respect for, the criminal justice system.

Many prominent organizations have endorsed this legislation. The organizations supporting HB32 include the Maryland chapter of the NAACP, The National Black Caucus of State Legislators, the ACLU, the Baltimore Sun, and the State Medical Association of Maryland. Fifteen states have already legalized and regulated Cannabis. In Virginia, Governor Ralph Northam's Cannabis legalization legislation has passed committee votes in both chambers (Adlin, 2021). In Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf has made Cannabis legalization a legislative priority in 2021 (Jaeger, 2021). Cannabis legalization legislation has also been filed in Delaware in 2021.

If the Maryland General Assembly is not able to pass HB32 during the 2021 session, I hope they will at least raise the amount of Cannabis considered a civil offense to one ounce, and not the arbitrary 10 grams, as outlined in HB324 and SB143.

We ask that you give a favorable report on HB 32.

Sincerely,

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References

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<https://www.marijuanamoment.net/virginia-marijuana-legalization-bills-sail-through-committees-as-key-friday-deadline-nears/>

Jaeger, Kyle. (2021). "Pennsylvania Governor Includes Marijuana Legalization in 2021 Priority List". Accessed February 2nd at: <https://www.marijuanamoment.net/pennsylvania-governor-includes-marijuana-legalization-in-2021-priority-list/>

Maryland Cannabis Policy Coalition. "Cannabis and Racial Justice". Fact sheet. Accessed February 2nd 2021 at:
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