

**Testimony on Maryland [HOUSE OR SENATE] Bill NUMBER: SB692**

**Bill Name:** Cannabis – Legalization and Regulation (Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs Act)

**TO:** Senator Brian Feldman, Finance Committee (Vice-Chair) and Executive Nominations Committee

Delegate Adrienne A. Jones, Speaker of the House  
Senator Delores G. Kelley, Chair and of the Finance Committee  
Senator Guy Guzzone, Budget and Taxation Committee (Chair), Executive Nominations Committee, Reapportionment, and Redistricting Rules Committee  
Senator Jim Rosapepe, Budget and Taxation Committee (Vice-Chair) and, Executive Nominations Committee  
Senator Joanne C. Benson, District 24  
Benjamin L. Cardin, U.S. Senator of Maryland  
Christopher Van Hollen, Jr., U.S. Senator of Maryland  
Anthony G. Brown, U.S. Representative, 4th Congressional District

**FROM:** Ms. Alfrieda Hylton, Progressive Maryland, Member, Prince George’s County, Capitol Heights Maryland, District 24

**DATE:** March 2, 2022

**POSITION:** SUPPORT

**Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony. Progressive Maryland is grassroots, nonprofit organization with 9 chapters from Frederick to the Lower Shore and more than 100,000 members and supporters who live in nearly every legislative district in the state. Also, there are dozens of affiliated community, faith, and labor organizations across the state that stand behind our work. Our mission is to improve the lives of working families in Maryland. Please note our strong SUPPORT FOR this bill.**

Ms. Alfrieda Hylton is a member of the Progressive Maryland Drug Policy Task Force and Reentry Work Group. She’s a resident of Capitol Heights, Maryland, Prince George’s County, District 24. Two of her older sons were driven from their jobs and families and pushed into the Federal prison system for “possession with intent to distribute” and both served approximately 16 years which contributes to racial and social class inequalities. The War on Drugs has been around for more than 50 years, and it hasn’t been a war on drugs at all. It’s been a war on people: people like her, and her family. Black people. The part where it was supposed to decrease drug use? That part failed.

In the nineties, her two older sons were driven from their jobs and families and pushed into the federal prison system for marijuana possession. This was at the peak of the drug war, and both were punished with the harshest possible sentences. Her sons served their time, but when they first came home, they were offered no jobs, no housing, and no compassion. With no other way to make a living, both ended up arrested again for the same reasons and even harsher sentences. They were caught in the trap that was set up for them to fail, a revolving door from the street to prison.

There were nobody cameras worn to document the excessive force from police when her sons were arrested, the police violated laws when they were stopped, searched, arrested, and convicted, her sons and so many others. There was never a warning when police invaded the privacy of her home. After serving

sixteen years behind bars, her sons were finally released to come home. Because these years were spread out from their teens when they were first arrested into their early thirties, this War on Drugs has disrupted their adult lives. The criminalization of marijuana has been a terrible mistake, and the racially disparate enforcement of marijuana laws has only compounded this mistake, with serious consequences, particularly to the people of color communities. The War on Drugs has been a complete failure. African Americans and Latino people are far more likely to be criminalized than white people. It has torn apart families and communities, ruined individuals' lives, and acted as a vehicle for racial injustice.

**Recommend:** End policies that exclude people with a record of arrest or conviction from key rights and opportunities. These include barriers to voting, employment, public housing, other public assistance, loans, financial aid, and child custody. I do agree with taken steps to regulate and legitimize the production, distribution, and use of cannabis and its derivatives. Development of a more rational cannabis policy requires better evaluations of both the health consequences of regular cannabis use and of the costs and benefits of enforcing the existing prohibition on its use. End ineffective, racially biased, and unjust criminal enforcement and it need to decouple marijuana from vice and crime otherwise remains a federal controlled substance. The cannabis legalization framework should explicitly state that public health promotion and protection as its primary goals. **Example of Inspiring Change:** The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is Canada's largest mental health teaching hospital and one of the world's leading research centers in its field. Instead, of a civil fine and prison confinement for first and, second-time offenses offer 6 months of community services, provide, and extend drug education, and drug treatment such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, contingency management, and motivational enhancement therapy. It reduces marijuana use, particularly among those involved with heavy use and those with more chronic mental disorders. Because people with marijuana use disorders, especially adolescents often also suffer from other psychiatric disorders. Rather than ban smoking of marijuana in a public place entirely expands places where marijuana smoking and vaping is allowed.

**We urge a FAVORABLE report on BILL NUMBER SB692. TESTIMONY ON CANNABIS LEGALIZATION IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND**

Testimony: 3/3/22

Cannabis – Legalization and Regulation (Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs Act)  
: SB0692

Dear Maryland General Assembly;

As a volunteer with Progressive Maryland's Drug and Alcohol Policy Task force, it's my privilege to discuss the importance of the above bill. The war on drugs and caused immense unnecessary tax payer dollar expenditure on incarcerating people who have been traumatized and re-traumatized by the system as well as those looking for emotional and physical pain relief as a result of other types of traumas in life. Cannabis is showing in countless studies to be so much more effective and healthier than various other prescription medications.

As someone who has personally worked deep in drug and alcohol counseling, jail/prison diversion, and having managed several programs (Trenton, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, DC), I've witnessed countless times where an individual is trying to get help for addiction and seeking effective services to turn one's life around, only to be arrested and pulled into jail, preventing treatment from occurring. We have all learned by now that there is almost nothing "correctional" in the correctional system. The correctional system causes people to revert back to a child like state and reverses the help the person may have been receiving from effective service provision in the community. I've also personally seen the relief people have experienced from simply coming off of opiate addiction and using cannabis for pain management, allowing them to live much more productive and healthy lives.

This bill is incredibly important and should be passed. I also would like to point out that drug treatment programs like what is provided by Empowerment Behavioral Therapeutic Services is an incredibly effective follow-up to ensure people get the treatment needed to be successful in their current and future endeavors in life. Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

Best Regards,

David Shrank, MSW, LCSW-C, LICSW

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