

March 1, 2022

SB 833—Cannabis Legalization and Regulation—Favorable

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice-Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland's affiliate to the National Afterschool Association.

We argue that the provisions outlined in Senate Bill 833 offer a sensible approach to statewide cannabis legalization and serve the needs of young people by explicitly allocating funding to youth development programs. The state has an opportunity to not only do away with the damaging effects of punitive drug policies, but also to strengthen the state's communities by leveraging hitherto untapped revenues derived from cannabis sales.

If enacted, the law would inherently address the equity concerns which lay at the heart of drug prohibition policies. It is common knowledge that drug enforcement practices disproportionately burden communities of color, and indeed, black residents have accounted for roughly 90% of arrests for marijuana possession since 2014. Decriminalization has been an insufficient reform program; legalization is long overdue. Criminal records for nonviolent crimes—especially marijuana possession—reinforce generational poverty by denying previous offenders from critical sources of financial aid, housing, and employment. Expunging these records as indicated in Senate Bill 833 is a practical first step towards reducing poverty and stigma.

Senate Bill 833 is the only cannabis legalization bill on the docket this session that allocates funding for community-based initiatives that are specifically designed to benefit young people. At the discretion of the Office of Social Equity, funds generated from cannabis tax revenues will be eligible investment in high-need communities through the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund. Expanded learning programs, recreational teams, and other organizations will undoubtedly reap the benefits of this program as tax revenues grow over the next ten years. Furthermore, the bill compliments these measures with explicit funding for drug education and abuse prevention programs.

Few questions facing Marylanders today stand to change the developmental outcomes of young people for the better. With Senate Bill 833, the General Assembly has the opportunity to rein in the excesses of the justice system while supporting invaluable youth development programs across the state. We strongly encourage the committee to provide a favorable report.

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