

To the members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am a resident of District 12 writing in solidarity with Showing Up for Racial Justice Annapolis and Anne Arundel County. I am testifying in support of SB0692, which would legalize the use and possession of cannabis by an individual 21 years of age. This bill would also provide a pathway to clear criminal records and dispositions of certain charges relating to the use and possession of cannabis, and establish a system for the regulation and taxation of the market for the production and sale of cannabis within the State of Maryland.

Though *this* bill is focused on the taxation and regulation of cannabis legalization, curtailing the epidemic of mass incarceration by ending marijuana prohibition is one important step to repairing the harm that was done to communities of color by the war on drugs. The next step requires resources to be reinvested directly back into the same communities that were harmed. The system for these reparations can be achieved through the regulation and taxation piece of the State.

In order to ensure the creation of an equitable market, there needs to be a focus on lowering the barriers of entry into a legal market. Growers and dispensaries, which are part of the industry, are extremely capital intensive which puts Black and Brown communities at a stark competitive disadvantage due to the immense wealth disparity between those and white communities. There needs to be a focus on enabling and supporting minority owned businesses to establish themselves in the new legal market created by this bill.

For this bill to be most effective in restoring justice from the war on drugs, it should include the following eight policies:

1. Vacature of all cannabis/marijuana-related convictions.
2. Allow opportunities for resentencing for convictions pertaining to cannabis-related offenses (e.g. - distribution).
3. Eliminate legal mechanisms that allow cannabis to be used to criminalize individuals. This includes raising the legal possession limit and prohibiting law enforcement from using the odor of cannabis as probable cause to search or arrest someone.
4. Individuals should be able to grow small amounts of cannabis in their home for personal use.
5. Micro-businesses should be able to be licensed to grow smaller amounts of cannabis to sell to the public.
6. Licenses for transportation, security, and social consumption sites should have preferences for 'minority enterprises'.
7. The process for companies to be awarded commercial licenses should have incentives for companies that do business with 'minority enterprises.'
8. 50% of tax revenues from cannabis sales should go back into the communities harmed most by the war on drugs. The revenue should be allocated directly to the local distribution so that the community can have an active role in how the resources are distributed.

I urge you to support SB692, as it is one of the steps Maryland can take to right the wrongs of our carceral system and the war on drugs.

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Erica Palmisano
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