



Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 692 Cannabis – Legalization and Regulation (Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs Act)

TO: Chair Senator Delores G. Kelley and Vice Chair Senator Brian J. Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee; and Chair Senator Guy Guzzone and Vice Chair Senator Jim Rosapepe, and Members of the Budget and Taxation Committee

FROM: Thomas Higdon, on behalf of The People's Commission to Decriminalize Maryland

I live in Reisterstown in the 10th district. I am survivor of the addiction and the “war on drugs.” Currently, I chair the Drug Policy work group for The People's Commission to Decriminalize Maryland. The Commission is grateful to Senator Carter for her tireless advocacy on behalf of the communities most harmed by prohibition drug policies. The interests of these communities are clearly reflected in SB 692, which includes the following provisions that are missing in other proposed legislation:

1. This bill is more comprehensive than other bills, as it will vacate past convictions and dismiss pending charges for possession, cultivation, and distribution. Other bills only address convictions and charges for possession of small amounts of cannabis. This would lead to an absurdly unjust outcome of someone rotting in prison for selling something that is now legal.
2. This bill dedicates 60% of cannabis revenue to a Community Investment and Repair Fund, which other bills only allocate up to 25%. Prohibition drug policies have destroyed lives, families, and entire communities. It is a moral imperative that most of the revenue from cannabis legalization go to repairing and restoring those communities.
3. This bill promotes justice by allowing a defendant to seek a new trial for any crime if the conviction was based on evidence discovered after a search in which probable cause was based solely on the presence or suspected presence. Too often in the past “cannabis odor” has been used as a pretext to perform otherwise unlawful searches.
4. This bill allows consumption of cannabis in public spaces where tobacco smoking is allowed. Without this provision, cannabis use will continue to be used as a pretext to stop, detain, and otherwise harass people from marginalized communities.

As a person in recovery, I have seen first-hand the harm caused by prohibition policies. Cannabis legalization is an incredible opportunity to begin undoing that harm. For these reasons, the People's Commission to Decriminalize Maryland urges this committee to support SB 692.