

March 3, 2022



THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

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**TESTIMONY ON SB692- POSITION: FAVORABLE**  
**Cannabis Reform**

**TO:** Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Finance Committee

**FROM:** Bruce H. Turnbull, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

**My name is Bruce H. Turnbull. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB692, Cannabis Reform, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ) and on my own behalf.** JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across Maryland in support of state and local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

JUFJ's support of this legislation stems from our core goal of promoting racial equity and racial justice. This is a core goal because we believe in the Jewish teachings that every person is made in the Divine image, that we must love our neighbor as ourselves, and that destroying one life destroys the whole world. Those and other Jewish (and human) values drive our work in relation to our legal system in many ways.

It is quite possible that enacting SB692 could be the single action that would have the largest benefit for racial equity and justice in our state, more than any other single action this legislature could take. We want to thank Senator Carter for her leadership in sponsoring this legislation. Convictions for cannabis possession and trafficking have disproportionately and unfairly impacted communities of color, Black and brown. Making possession and trafficking a matter of a legally regulated system, and not subject to criminal penalties, would reduce the unfair burdens of our legal system on people from those communities.

In order to achieve this critical benefit, however, it is *essential* that any legislation to create a legal system for possession and distribution of cannabis and related products must include –

- automatic vacating of all previous convictions for acts this legislation would make non-criminal, including a mechanism to enable resentencing for any conviction that includes both a cannabis-related act and other actions found to be crimes;

- ensuring that Black and Brown businesses play significant roles in order to obtain substantial benefits from the development of cannabis-related businesses; and
- using all or a very substantial part of the tax revenue resulting from a legalized cannabis distribution system as a form of reparations to redress the long history of harm to Black Americans, starting with slavery and extending through the Jim Crow era, the War on Drugs, and most recently in the racial discrimination and inequities embedded in our society and society's institutions.

**In line with the above, JUFJ believes that SB692 contains all of the elements necessary to address the points noted just above.** While we appreciate Senator Feldman's intentions, as well as the intentions of those supporting a different approach in the House of Delegates, we believe that the elements noted above and others that are incorporated in SB692 must be in the authorizing legislation now, not studied, and that the realities of the current "marketplace" must be taken into account in setting the allowable quantities and the level of taxation to be imposed. Otherwise, we fear that the effort will be well-intentioned but a failure - continuing to cause the incarceration of too many Black and brown people and perpetuating the "extra-legal" sales and distribution system that now exists.

Our primary concern is that the shift to recreational cannabis be done in the most equitable way possible. Accordingly, **we urge a favorable report of SB692.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.