



March 3, 2022

The Honorable Delores Kelley
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Senate Bill 692 - Cannabis - Legalization and Regulation (Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs Act) - FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Kelley and Senate Finance Committee members,

Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition (BHRC) is an advocacy organization that mobilizes community members for the health, dignity, and safety of people targeted by the war on drugs and anti-sex worker policies. As a certified Overdose Response Program, Naloxone distributor, and syringe service program, we have provided essential health care services across the state for years. BHRC supports Senate Bill 692 Cannabis - Legalization and Regulation (Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs Act).

SB692 proposes comprehensive legalization that would support community health and justice. This legislation would legalize personal possession and home cultivation of cannabis for adults, automatically vacate previous marijuana-related convictions, provide for release of individuals currently incarcerated for some cannabis-related convictions, ensure that legal cannabis use cannot be the basis for denying someone a driver's license, professional license, housing assistance, social services, or other benefits, and reinvest 60% of tax revenue to communities hardest hit by the war on drugs.

BHRC supports SB692 and broader efforts to gain community reparation from over a century of harm. Over 145 years of criminalizing people - mostly Black people - who use drugs has devastated communities across the country. Maryland must prioritize the health, dignity, and safety of its residents, including systemic community healing after decades of over-policing and mass incarceration due to the war on drugs. We support the legalization efforts proposed in SB692 because it details steps toward repair from the violent drug war, including a Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund that will disburse funds to counties based on their rate of cannabis arrests. Counties must then distribute these funds to community-based organizations that benefit low-income communities or serve communities disproportionately harmed by the War on Drugs.

The relationship between substance use, housing instability, incarceration, survival behavior, and racism are deeply intertwined. It is our Black community members who are most often subjected to this cycle of homelessness and incarceration, making up the majority of both homeless and incarcerated individuals in Maryland. Adding to this incredible injustice and experiences of marginalization is the increasingly deadly overdose epidemic. During 2020, as the deadly COVID-19 pandemic flooded the U.S., drug and alcohol related intoxication deaths in Maryland reached a

staggering 2,799 fatalities. Overdose fatalities have steadily increased among Black Marylanders since 2012, increasing 16% from 2019-2020.¹

In the midst of multiple intersecting public health crises, Marylanders deserve the relief that this bill provides by reducing policing, surveillance, and incarceration for cannabis possession and cultivation. It is the least we can do to begin a path towards repair for unjust laws and community devastation -- waged in part by mass criminalization and the war on drugs. **We ask that the Senate Finance Committee give SB692 a favorable report.**

For more information about Baltimore Harm Reduction Coalition or our position, please contact our Director of Mobilization, Rajani Gudlavalleti at Rajani@BaltimoreHarmReduction.org

¹ Maryland Department of Health (June 2021). Unintentional Drug- and Alcohol-Related Intoxication Deaths* in Maryland 2020 Annual Report.