

## **Testimony for the Senate Finance Committee**

**March 3, 2022**

### **SB 692 - Cannabis – Legalization and Regulation (Cannabis Legalization and Reparations for the War on Drugs Act)**

#### **FAVORABLE**

My name is Kamille Jones and I am writing to indicate my support for SB 692. This bill would legalize adult use and possession of certain amounts of cannabis, clear criminal records of certain marijuana related charges, and establish guidelines for the distribution of revenue from the marijuana industry. This bill seeks to provide redress to communities who have been hurt by the failed “War on Drugs” by centering race equity in provisions for tax revenue distribution, funding for community programs, and regulation of the legal marijuana industry.

This bill not only takes the necessary steps to ensure that legalization does not happen without consideration for the communities and individuals who have been hurt by marijuana enforcement, it ensures that those communities can enjoy the benefits of a legal marijuana industry. Black and brown individuals have been historically underrepresented in the legal marijuana industry. This bill would use a point system for the applicants for licenses that more heavily weigh things like working with "minority businesses." Additionally, this bill requires that 30% of the licenses be owned by a person who is a member of a group that has been historically, disproportionately impacted by marijuana prohibition. The bill also directs 2% of tax revenue to the Small, Women, Minority, Business fund that currently provides support to minority businesses.

Throughout November of 2020, I and 2 other Black Blair Wellness Center managers were each individually terminated immediately after bringing up wage discrimination and inequitable business practices to Matt Blair (Owner) or the Human Resource manager. Subsequent to my separation I personally experienced intimidation tactics from Human Resources to coerce me into signing a confidentiality agreement/ severance package that would stop me from moving forward with EEOC charges. After I refused to sign what I deemed an unconscionable contract without legal counsel, I was met with theft charges being pressed against me and former Black colleagues. My reason for termination changed 3 times prior to the theft accusation.

Matt Blair lied to the police and misrepresented our actions surrounding employee purchases in order to press criminal charges against us (11-19-2020). The 3 of us were being accused of theft and theft scheme for commonplace employee discounting practices every employee benefited from. These discounted transactions were performed by all managers, but only the whistle-blowers of color were charged criminally. Our white counterparts who benefited from the same employee discounting practices are still employed at Blair Wellness Center, have since

received promotions and are still currently discounting medical cannabis products in the same manner we were charged for.

These retroactive criminal charges that consisted of transactions months prior were only pressed against us in an effort to silence us and ultimately blackball us from the cannabis industry. Matt Blair understood that by ruining our reputations, onlookers would question our horrific experiences of discrimination and ultimately not believe us. The organization Black Cannabis Matters was informed of what happened via another Blair Wellness Center employee and posted a Discrimination Alert on social media to make the public aware of the blatant racism. In a statement written by a hired PR team (12-05-20), Matt Blair responded by telling the public that we are nothing but disgruntled thieves who created a “different narrative” behind our terminations. Mr. Blair also reached out to people via social media unsolicited and sent them our case numbers directly.

These lies have caused each of us insufferable trauma. This situation made it difficult to find work and maneuver within the very small Maryland medical cannabis industry over the last year and a half. We were publicly humiliated. The criminal cases were thrown out due to a lack of evidence and because the owner Matt Blair never showed up to court after alleging something so egregious (04-06-20). These alleged acts of diversion were also never reported to the MMCC by Blair Wellness Center ownership because there would have been an investigation. I have filed a civil suit that directly addresses the discrimination, retaliation, defamation and malicious prosecution at the hands of Matt Blair.

This bill presents a comprehensive approach to legalization that ensures that the communities who were hurt by marijuana prohibition are not left behind in legalization efforts.

For the foregoing reasons, I fully support SB 692 and encourage a favorable report on the bill