

March 1, 2022

Dear Senate Finance Committee,

On October 17, 2019, my nephew, Demonte Ward Blake was stopped by a Prince George's County police officer for driving a vehicle with suspended tags. The encounter was escalated by the officer requesting to search the vehicle because of the smell of marijuana. Unfortunately for Demonte this traffic stop left him paralyzed. He suffered a broken nose, neck, and back and due to complications from the excessive force administered by the officer, he is no longer with us today.

Traffic stops due to the odor of marijuana is disproportional in the black and brown communities than any other area and leads to unnecessary jail time. I stand with Senator Jill P. Carter and other partners to support Senate Bill 692, which calls for the following:

1. Legalize marijuana for Marylanders 21 and older
2. Raise the legal possession limit to 4 ounces
3. Prohibit police from using the odor of marijuana, without other legitimate cause for suspicion, as probable cause to arrest and perform a warrantless search of a person or vehicle
4. Vacate previous marijuana-related convictions and mandate reconsideration hearings and vacatur for those currently serving time for marijuana convictions, and other low-level felonies and misdemeanors if those charges stem from a conviction from a search due to odor of marijuana
5. Ensure that legal marijuana use cannot be the basis for housing, parole, or child custody denial
6. Reallocate 60% of the tax revenue directly to Black and Brown communities most targeted by police.

It is time for us to address these issues that implement unjust penalties to those in black and brown communities and to provide financial reparations to those communities that will fund programs in the fight for the War on Drugs. It is time to pass Senate Bill 692.

Respectfully,
Josette Blocker