



WRITTEN TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 556 with Amendments

February 15, 2023
Economic Matters Committee
Maryland House of Delegates

TO: Hon. CT Wilson, Chair, and
Members of the Committee

FR: Nelson Hill
VP/Executive Assistant to the President, United Food & Commercial Workers
International Union Local 27
21 West Road, Towson, MD 21204

Chair Wilson and Members of the Committee, on behalf of the 18,000 working men and women represented by United Food & Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) Local 27, I am submitting testimony in support of HB 556 with Amendments.

Nationally, UFCW represents over 1.3 million hard-working men and women who work in highly regulated industries including the emerging legal cannabis industry. Our cannabis members can be found across multiple states in growing and cultivating facilities, manufacturing, and processing facilities, and in laboratories and dispensaries, including in Maryland.

UFCW Local 27 supports the legalization of recreational cannabis in Maryland with the addition of labor peace agreements as a condition of cannabis licensure and renewal. Labor peace agreements protect businesses, workers, and consumers, and are an effective regulatory tool for the state.

Wherever cannabis is legalized, the UFCW is committed to building family sustaining jobs and a strong, diverse, and skilled workforce. These are good-paying, union jobs in an area that has a higher unemployment rate than the state average.

We commend Chair Wilson for sponsoring this legislation which is reflective of attitude of the country and the state of Maryland. Eighteen states and the District of Columbia have already legalized adult use cannabis and 60% of Marylanders support legalization for adults over 21 years of age.

We want to emphasize one important fact: the cannabis industry in Maryland does not operate in a free-market environment. It is a state-sanctioned and regulated. Unlike a traditional market not anyone is entitled to open a business and compete for business; a limited number of licenses are awarded by the state.

As a regulated, non-competitive industry, the state has an interest in ensuring the industry promotes the public good. That the industry is open to women and minority owned businesses. That we are growing local businesses instead of only promoting multi-state operators backed by venture capital.

The bill includes numerous provisions that address outstanding criminal justice reform issues and the need for equity and inclusion to ensure the industry is reflective of the state and grows local businesses.

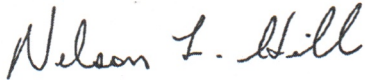
As a regulated, non-competitive industry, the state also has an interest in ensuring the jobs created will pay a family sustaining, living wage.

The inclusion of labor peace language allows employees to exercise their right to unionize without intimidation or coercion and ensures a democratic process. In addition, collective bargaining agreements generally mean employees will be covered by health and welfare plans, removing the drain of the state established social safety net.

The inclusion of this language is also closes a loophole some employers have used to deny worker's their rights. Since the federal government still considers cannabis an "federally" illegal industry, the federal government has avoided a decision on employee's right to organize under the normal procedure of National Labor Relations Act. The inclusion of a labor peace language in the regulations ensures that workers in this industry have the same rights as other workers in Maryland. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

I urge the Committee to SUPPORT HB 556 with Amendments.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nelson L. Hill".

Nelson Hill
VP/Executive Assistant to the President
United Food & Commercial Workers Local 27