



Testimony in Support of HB556

Cannabis Reform

Dear Chair Wilson and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Ricarra Jones, and I am the Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East. We are the largest healthcare workers union in the nation – representing 10,000 healthcare workers in long-term care facilities and hospitals across Maryland. Our union is supporting HB556 to establish equity in the cannabis market by ensuring that the licensing and approval process is equitable.

As we know, Marylanders overwhelmingly voted to approve the sale and recreational use of marijuana which will become legal on July 1st. **We must prevent making the same mistakes we made in the medical marijuana industry**, when the states medical cannabis licensing process was a blind application process that resulted in a first round of licenses being awarded almost entirely to white entrepreneurs. The General Assembly has committed to distributing licenses equitably and lawmakers have set aside \$40 million in the state budget to assist minority businesses.

In order to make sure we are not leaving behind the people who have “previously been disproportionately harmed by the war on drugs,” a new office of **Social Equity in the cannabis division should be established to promote participation from these communities**. We must create a Community Reinvestment & Repair Fund to allocate money to traditionally affected communities as well as create a Cannabis Business Assistance Fund to increase minority participation in the program.

We are excited to be able to create black and brown wealth here in Maryland with the incoming cannabis industry. We strongly believe that the most equitable and sustainable way to do that is through **labor peace agreements**. LPA's imposes obligations on BOTH parties - employers would have to respect and remain neutral if/when their workers decide to organize, and labor organizations would not be allowed to interfere with the employer's business. LPA's are important because workers need to be protected. We have all seen what happens when workers try to organize without LPA's (Starbucks, Amazon, ect). Workers are harassed, targeted, and fired. Labor laws are woefully inadequate to protect workers and their right to organize.

The cannabis industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the nation, and the state reported cannabis dispensaries had nearly \$41 million in revenues in December alone. As the cannabis industry grows, regulations with a labor peace agreement will support workers' ability to obtain a fair share of this economic growth while reducing racial and gender inequality. We must protect public health, establish a regulated recreational cannabis market, and keep people out of jail. These communities, primarily of color, can not be left behind because we will not be able to catch up.

HB556 will ensure that we legalize Maryland right and for these reasons above and more, we urge the committee to issue a favorable report.

In unity,

Ricarra Jones
Political Director, 1199SEIU
Ricarra.jones@1199.org