



Working to Reform Marijuana Laws

Maryland: HB 556/SB 516, Testimony in support of cannabis reform

My name is Jax James, and I serve as the State Policy Manager for the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). I would like to thank the House Committee on Economic Matters and the Senate Committee on Finance and Budget and Taxation for considering HB 556/SB 516. NORML supports legislative efforts that legalize and regulate the adult-use cannabis market.

We applaud the goal of this legislation to swiftly adopt and regulate cannabis sales, as per the wishes of the majority of Maryland voters. Because NORML believes that ending marijuana prohibition cannot be successful without actively working to repair the harms caused by the failed war on drugs, we particularly support the establishment of the Office of Social Equity and the administration of the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund.

However, as introduced, this legislation provides no protections from discrimination for those adults who consume cannabis legally while away from the job. Similar legislation has already been enacted in several nearby states, including Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island explicitly. These laws rightfully distinguish between employees who simply test positive for the past use of cannabis on workplace drug tests from those who are actually impaired while at work. Maryland law should make this same distinction.

Changes in the legal status of marijuana have not been shown to impact workplace safety or productivity adversely. For example, a pair of studies from 2016 found that adult-use legalization is associated with greater workforce participation and fewer workplace absences. A 2020 study published in the journal *Occupational Medicine* report found “no association” between off-the-job cannabis use and work-related accidents or injuries.

Those who consume conventional medications or alcohol legally and responsibly while off the job do not suffer sanctions from their employers unless their work performance is adversely impacted. Employers should treat those who consume cannabis legally while away from the workplace in a similar manner.

Never in modern history has there existed greater public support for repealing the nation’s nearly century-long experiment with marijuana prohibition. It’s time to stop ceding control and revenue of the marijuana market to unregulated and untaxed enterprises. A pragmatic regulatory framework that licenses the production and sale of marijuana to adults – but continues to criminalize sale to minors – best reduces the risks associated with its use and commerce.

