

March 9, 2023

CBD Apothecary SB 516 Testimony

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, Madam Vice-Chair, esteemed members of the Committee,

My name is Richard Parker. I am the owner of CBD Apothecary – CBD wellness stores that specialize in products that people use for neck, back and joint pain relief, nausea, sleep aids, and depression. I own four stores spanning Districts 40 and 41 in Baltimore City and Districts 42A and 44B in Baltimore County. I served honorably for 22 years in the United States Army and, prior to opening CBD Apothecary, I served as the state deputy director of the union AFSCME. I got into the CBD business after an army buddy and I stopped past our favorite Ravens store two years ago to purchase some gear for the upcoming season. Part of the space had been converted to a CBD store. My buddy, after inquiring about what CBD was, very skeptically tried some on his knee. After about 15 minutes of walking around the store, he nudged me and said, "This is crazy but knee really feels better!" He followed up the next day after returning home to Virginia to say that he was still feeling relief. Understanding what this application could do for any number of our fellow veterans, we got into business together. Since that time, we've been able to make believers out of the most cynical of people including my very religious mom who, after a great deal of education and trial, now not only has another reason to call me daily, but also has brought along many of the sisters from her church.

I will tell you that opening a CBD store has not been just a personal journey but one that has drawn in a network of other small business owners, athletes, and members of the community. Being from Baltimore City, I have made a very conscious effort to employ young people from the city – people whose lack of education, experience and troubled backgrounds have made it difficult for them to find employment. I have taken these same folks, who have been crucial to my success, and paid for CDL training, Early Childhood Education training and startup costs to own and operate their own businesses. None of my employees make less than \$20 an hour and I am a regular sponsor of youth sports in the communities where I am located.

So what brings me here today are two provisions in SB 516, Sections 36-1103 (A)(1) & (B) that would not only cause irreparable harm to local, small business CBD store owners but also the local supply chain that provides all of the equipment and products necessary to operate a CBD store. To be even more frank, with these provisions included, it would put me and my employees out of business on July 1. Even if all

current retailers were able to apply for and receive an adult-use license, they would still be out of business between the time the bill goes into effect on July 1 and when the first round of licenses are awarded in January 2024. And, even then, there is still no guarantee that any current retailer will in fact receive a dispensary license.

My ask is that any amendment surrounding a cap of Delta-9 THC be made to be in compliance with federal regulation. It does not stand reason that scientifically less potent CBD products be banned or made available only through Adult-Use licensees at a time when we are relaxing restrictions on more potent Adult-use cannabis while also giving those already very profitable Adult-use licensees an even greater monopoly over the market.

Let me close by emphasizing, local, small business, CBD retailers and others are not asking for a hand-out or a free pass. Quite the contrary. The responsible ones of us who care about our communities would like to see the consumable hemp industry (CBD) regulated by the Cannabis Regulation and Enforcement Division established in SB516. We have language ready to go. We are trying to regulate hemp products that are non-intoxicating and significantly less intoxicating than adult-use cannabis. We agree that the public should be kept safe through testing and regulation and believe that incorporating this industry into the new regulatory body is the best path forward. I ask that when you move forward in your deliberations that you not only consider the destructive nature of these provisions to local small business owners and our local suppliers, but also our employees, members of our community who find relief in our non-addictive products....and, most importantly, consider Geraldine Parker in hopes that those daily calls might find themselves being bi-weekly.

I thank you for your time and for the Herculean and masterful effort you and your colleagues have put into getting this legislation right for the citizens of Maryland. Thank you.