



## Because We C.A.R.E

### Testimony on Maryland Senate Bill 0516 Cannabis Reform

TO: Senator Melanie Griffith Chair, and Senate members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Shanetha Lewis, Veterans Initiative 22, Executive Director

DATE: 3/08/2023

POSITION: Favorable with Amendments

Veterans Initiative 22 is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that focuses on helping Veterans, Family and First Responders by providing resources, employment opportunities, and continuously advocating for rights and access to affordable cannabis and Veteran rights. VI 22 was named as such after the estimated 22 Veterans who commit suicide daily due to PTSD, and it is our organization's goal to bring national awareness to this tragedy, while also working to improve the lives of Veterans across the country.

Additionally, we actively seek and advocate for more Veteran employment opportunities within the cannabis, alternative medicine, and holistic wellness industries. We invite businesses and organizations to evaluate hiring processes, business practices, and keep Veterans in mind; as they are, without a doubt, valuable assets to any organization.

Please note our strong **support** for this bill with amendment. For the following reasons:

First I want to say thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of **SB0516** Cannabis Reform My name is Shanetha Marable Lewis and I hold a Master's degree in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics from the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy, I am proud Army combat veteran, spouse of a 20 year retired Army combat veteran, and I am also the Executive Director of Veterans Initiative 22, a non-profit organization named as such in honor of the previously estimated 22 veterans who commit suicide daily. I strongly support the Cannabis Reform Bill for both my non-profit mission as well as my personal entrepreneurial endeavors. I wish to own and operate a Cannabis Wellness Center under a Consumption Lounge License. In the Cannabis Reform Bill and proposed Social Equity standards there is no provision, exception or qualification that



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includes Veterans, and more specifically Veterans that are a part of a minority group, like myself, I am a disabled veteran woman of color. Based on the current specifications for Social Equity licensee applicants, I would not fall into any of those categories as I would be disqualified for consideration SOLELY due to the amount of time I have lived in the area, although I plan to remain in Maryland for the foreseeable future as this is where my family resides and where I plan to raise my children and with no intention of relocating, and I believe military service should nullify the in state residency time requirement. I simply ask for an accommodation for minority veterans to be included in your list of qualified applicants and to allow military service to be an exception to the residency time requirements, Again I thank you for your time in reading my testimony, for your consideration of the amendments I proposed and for your support in the passage of this bill.

Thank You,

Shanetha Lewis, M.S MCST  
Veterans Initiative 22  
Executive Director  
304-322-6384  
[info@vetransinitiative22.com](mailto:info@vetransinitiative22.com)