



March 28, 2023

Senator Willam C. Smith, Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of The Committee:

The Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland offers strong **favorable** support for House Bill 135 - Criminal Law - Controlled Dangerous Substances and Firearms - **This bill is on the 2023 legislative priority agenda of the Black Caucus.**

In effect, this legislation will specify that manufacturing, distributing, dispensing, or possessing specific large quantities of certain controlled dangerous substances is a felony; defining a "drug kingpin" as an organizer, supervisor, financier, or manager who acts as a co-conspirator in a conspiracy to manufacture, distribute, dispense, transport in, or bring a controlled dangerous substance into the State; and altering the penalties for being a volume dealer and drug kingpin with regard to cannabis.

This bill establishes reduced penalties for cannabis-related violations of the prohibitions on being a volume dealer and a drug kingpin; authorizes specified individuals incarcerated for violations of §§ 5-612 and 5-613 to file an application for a modification or reduction of a mandatory minimum sentence; modifies penalties and crime classifications for specified firearms offenses; and authorizes a person at least age 21 to manufacture a personal use amount of cannabis products or concentrated cannabis, as specified. The bill also specifies in statute that with the exception of a violation involving cannabis, a violation of the volume dealer statute is a felony.

In light of the legalization of cannabis use in Maryland, it is critical that modifications are made to several policies currently in place. This bill will reduce penalties and alter prohibitions regarding cannabis, abating unjust criminalization. Throughout the nation and in the State of Maryland, Black people disproportionately make up the majority of Maryland's incarcerated population. Considering this, there is a need for reformative policy that will modify the penalties of cannabis-related offenses in Maryland. For these reasons, the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland supports House Bill 135 and would appreciate your favorable support of this legislation.

Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland