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Judiciary Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 3rd, 2022

The Honorable Delegate Luke Clippinger

Chairman of the House Judiciary

Committee

6 Bladen Street, Room 101

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

House Bill
0232

Good afternoon, Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the House Judiciary Committee. I am Delegate Nicole Williams of District 22, and I will be testifying today in favor of **House Bill 0232**, also known as **Child in Need of Assistance - Neglect - Marijuana Use**. This legislation would change how marijuana use by parents is viewed during Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) proceedings. The use of marijuana by a parent will not serve as reason enough by itself to separate a child from his or her parent unless additional findings were proving that the child is in danger.

This legislation comes at a time when attitudes toward marijuana use are shifting across the country. As of right now, 39 states allow marijuana use for medical purposes, 23 states have fully decriminalized possession, and 19 states have legalized recreational use for adults. Here in Maryland, the possession of small amounts of marijuana has been decriminalized, and a fully-fledged system has been developed to sell marijuana for medical use. We are, however, still a few steps away from full legalization as a State. As we have the conversation and pass legislation out of the House to move towards full legalization, we should also have a conversation about the impact that marijuana use plays in Child in Need of Assistance cases.

These lingering restrictions regarding marijuana possession and usage have, in the

words of the American Medical Association, “disproportionately and adversely impacted marginalized and minority communities.” Marijuana use among Black and White individuals is roughly the same, with some estimates reporting slightly lower use among Black populations. Yet according to a 2020 study from the ACLU, Black individuals are 3.64 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession. These disparities also exist in legal proceedings, like CINA cases involving neglect and marijuana use, and often cause irreparable damage to the structure of a family.

A parent’s marijuana use alone does not determine their ability to care for their child. Separating families based on marijuana use exacerbates trauma and anxiety for both the parent and the child. This long overdue legislation will help to change the culture around marijuana.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to give a favorable report on House Bill 0232.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole A. Williams, Esq." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Delegate Nicole A. Williams, Esq.