

VETERANS INITIATIVE 22

Because We C.A.R.E

Testimony on Maryland House Bill 0525:

TO: Delegate C. T. Wilson Chair, House Members of the Economics Matters Committee

FROM: Shanetha Lewis, Veterans Initiative 22, Executive Director

DATE: 02/21/2024

BILL: HB0525

POSITION: Favorable

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.

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

First I want to say thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony in support of SB. 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 a proud Army combat veteran, spouse of a 20 year retired Army combat veteran, and I am also the Executive Director of Veterans Initiative 22.

I am here today representing my organization and to advocate for our heroes at home, a population that overwhelmingly supports medical cannabis and a population that is disproportionately effected by PTSD, Suicide, and Mental Health issues. This same veteran population who when they are "off duty" from their place of employment that make the choice to lawfully consume cannabis, which is within their rights, whether it be in a recreational or medicinal capacity, are unjustly faced with the obstacle of being barred from employment or being fired from their current jobs due to their once again "off duty" usage of a legal product.

As studies have shown, employees who consume cannabis pose no greater risk to safety and discriminating against cannabis users due to positive urine analysis is an ineffective workplace safety policy.¹ As these tests do not determine whether an employee

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is inebriated or under the influence of cannabis the at the given or current moment of collection but they rather a reflection of past usage.

The federal government has made a promise to every veteran to provide the best care possible. How are our veterans being cared for properly if they must choose between their economic health and their mental and or biological health? Our esteemed Governor Wes Moore dedicated 2024 as the “Year of the military family” This bill would substantially help to bolster that honorable promise and further our Governors mission by reducing the burden and removing the barriers to employment and/or the risk of loss of current employment that many Veteran, Gold Star Family Members, and Veteran Caregivers who are cannabis consumers are unjustly faced with.

Again I thank you for your time in reading my testimony and for your consideration of my position. Cannabis is medicine and unrestricted affordable access to cannabis improves and saves lives!

We urge a favorable report on [HB0525](#).

Thank You,

Shanetha Lewis
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