



SB 469

Maryland Cannabis Administration – Cannabis Licensing – Protests of Renewal

Hearing before the Senate Finance Committee

Feb. 22, 2024

POSITION: Favorable

Community Law Center (CLC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, which is a legal partner to Maryland neighborhoods and nonprofits in pursuit of more just and vibrant communities. CLC provides direct legal representation to communities and nonprofits on issues like tax exemption and nonprofit governance, real estate, contracts, intellectual property, employment law, and more. We advocate on issues that impact our Maryland neighborhood clients, including to address nuisance and dangerous liquor establishments.

CLC supports SB 469 to give residents a voice when a cannabis licensee is negatively impacting their community. For many years, CLC has been an advocate for communities dealing with problem liquor licensees in Baltimore City. As the cannabis industry grows in Maryland, our neighborhood clients are reporting many of the same issues with cannabis licensees that they have experienced with liquor licensees. Problems like crime and violence associated with establishments, trash and vandalism in the vicinity, and sales to minors, have all been factors in communities seeking to protest the renewal of liquor licenses. Now, those issues are arising in connection with new cannabis licenses. And, as with liquor establishments, community members have reported feeling overwhelmed by the density of new cannabis licensees, particularly in predominantly Black neighborhoods.

For liquor establishments, annual license renewal time provides a critical opportunity for impacted communities to raise objections and receive a fair hearing, and for the Baltimore City Board of Liquor License Commissioners (BLLC) to fairly weigh specific complaints against problem outlets in deciding whether their renewals are merited. The protesting community members hold the significant burden of demonstrating the problems caused by the establishment. Community members must attempt communication with the licensee and establishment operator, call in code violations and criminal reports, keep logs and records, and gather signatures (which is especially difficult when residents may feel fearful of so publicly going against the business). But without this opportunity for protesting annual renewals, communities would lose one of the few tools they have to deal with licensees whose operations are a detriment to the safety or welfare of their neighborhoods. Regulation of cannabis outlets must provide for this same level of accountability as that of liquor outlets.

HB 469 leaves to the Administration the development and implementation of regulations to allow residents and communities to protest the renewals of cannabis licenses. CLC urges support for this bill to move forward this process of developing regulations around this new industry. CLC supports SB 469. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

For the above reasons,

CLC urges a FAVORABLE VOTE ON SB 469.

Please contact Shana Roth-Gormley, Staff Attorney at Community Law Center, with any questions.

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