

VETERANS INITIATIVE 22

Because We C.A.R.E

Testimony on Maryland Senate Bill 0215:

TO: Senator Pamela Beidel Chair, Senate Finance Committee and Committee members

FROM: Shanetha Lewis, Veterans Initiative 22, Executive Director

DATE: 01/28/2025

BILL: SB0215

POSITION: **Unfavorable**

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 **opposition** for this bill. For the following reasons:

I write to express our organization's unfavorable position for SB0215, which seeks to regulate on-site cannabis consumption establishments and cannabis events. I recognize and respect that this bill represents a vital step toward creating structured opportunities for safe and legal cannabis use within the community, fostering equitable participation in the cannabis industry while prioritizing public health and safety.

However, I respectfully recommend a clarification regarding the following language within the bill:

The definition of a "cannabis event," as outlined in Section 36-407.1(A)(2). Specifically, the bill defines a cannabis event as one involving "the consumption of cannabis products by individuals on the premises of the event," authorized through a cannabis event registration. While this definition outlines basic parameters, further specificity would aid stakeholders in understanding the intended scope and limitations of such events. For example, clarification could address:

1. **Permitted Types of Consumption:** Explicitly stating whether "consumption" includes edible products, beverages, topicals, or other forms beyond what is already prohibited (e.g., smoking or vaping).

VETERANS INITIATIVE 22

Because We C.A.R.E

2. **Regulatory Guidance:** Defining what constitutes appropriate "premises of the event," such as temporary structures, outdoor venues, or enclosed spaces.
3. **Event Scope and Audience:** Providing guidance on whether events can include educational, cultural, or entertainment components alongside cannabis consumption.

Due to the ambiguity in the current language of the bill being proposed, as well as, within the current COMAR regulations regarding adult consumption, adult consumers and organizations that hold private adult only events that allow adult consumption, are in a current state of confusion.

I find the proposed fees for registering cannabis consumption events to be excessively high, creating significant economic barriers for businesses or organizations hosting smaller, consumption-friendly gatherings. Additionally, much of the language surrounding cannabis events seems to imply that such events are primarily recreational or "party-like" in nature. In reality, many of these gatherings are therapeutic in focus, emphasizing health, wellness, and community support. It is important that the framework acknowledges and accommodates the diverse purposes these events serve.

Additionally, I support the bill's emphasis on ensuring social equity by limiting applications for consumption lounge licenses to social equity applicants, as well as its safeguards to prohibit intoxicated patrons and underage access. These measures align with the overarching goals of public safety and responsible use. However I do feel again that there is a lack of clarity in what are the "certain circumstances" that would permit those outside the approved social equity applicants to apply for a consumption lounge license. Our organization stands staunchly in support of INCLUDING veterans as part of the persons who can qualify as "social equity" and has found this lack of inclusion to be a travesty and affront to the former service members who sacrificed for this great country and then are denied inclusion into these social equity programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. I am confident that with the proposed clarification, SB0125 will better serve Maryland's cannabis community and industry. 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 unfavorable report on **SB0215**.

VETERANS INITIATIVE 22

Because We C.A.R.E

Thank You,

Shanetha Lewis
Veterans Initiative 22
Executive Director
304-322-6384
info@vetransinitiative22.com