

## Witness Statement for Senate Bill 215

### Maryland Senate Finance Committee

Date: January 28, 2025

Dear Chair and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Taylor Green, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Ember DMV LLC (Ember), a newly established micro dispensary and social equity applicant preparing to launch operations. We are committed to advancing Maryland's cannabis industry and fostering equitable opportunities for small businesses like ours. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 215, titled *Cannabis - On-Site Consumption Establishments and Cannabis Events*.

Senate Bill 215, introduced on January 8, 2025, by the Chair of the Finance Committee at the request of the Maryland Cannabis Administration (MCA), seeks to establish provisions for on-site cannabis consumption establishments and cannabis events. While this legislation represents an exciting step forward for Maryland's cannabis community, Ember seeks clarification and amendments to ensure micro dispensaries can participate fully in this evolving landscape.

As a micro dispensary, Ember is limited by the prohibition on brick-and-mortar establishments. This restriction challenges our ability to connect with consumers, promote our products, and engage with the broader cannabis community. The opportunities provided by on-site consumption establishments and cannabis events offer a promising avenue for micro dispensaries like ours to showcase our products and services in a community-centered environment. However, the current legislation lacks clarity on whether micro dispensaries can participate in or host these events.

To address these concerns, we respectfully propose the following considerations and amendments to Senate Bill 215:

1. **Permit Micro Dispensaries to Participate in Cannabis Events:** Clarify that micro dispensaries can participate in cannabis events, either through partnerships with existing dispensaries or by obtaining permits to showcase and sell products at events hosted at on-site consumption establishments or other approved venues. This inclusion is vital for micro dispensaries to build brand recognition, engage directly with consumers, and compete in the market.
2. **Clarification on Off-Site Cannabis Events:** Provide clear regulatory guidance on whether cannabis events can take place at locations other than on-site consumption establishments, provided the organizers obtain the necessary permits. For events held outside of designated on-site consumption establishments, cannabis consumption should not be permitted. However, in such cases, alcohol consumption should be

allowed, provided there is no cannabis consumption at the event, ensuring alignment with existing regulations. To further support safe practices, cannabis purchased at such events could be distributed only upon exit, preventing on-site use and ensuring attendees do not re-enter with the product. While we recognize concerns about potential substance mixing, it is important to note that nothing prevents attendees from leaving an event to use cannabis elsewhere, such as at a neighborhood bar. This is ultimately the responsibility of the consumer. To mitigate these risks, we can ensure that educational materials and reminders about the dangers of combining substances, including the implications of driving under the influence of cannabis, are made readily available at all events.

3. **Equity in Access to Cannabis Events:** Ensure that the permitting process for cannabis events is inclusive and accessible to social equity applicants like Ember. The current proposed fee of \$5,000 for permits is prohibitively high for micro licenses, which already operate under significant financial constraints. Micro dispensaries face nearly identical operational costs to standard dispensaries, including compliance, staffing, and logistical expenses, while being limited by employee caps. A reduced fee structure for micro dispensaries and other micro-businesses would provide much-needed relief and ensure equitable participation in cannabis events.
4. **Collaboration with Existing On-Site Consumption Establishments:** Explicitly permit micro dispensaries to collaborate with licensed on-site consumption establishments to host promotional events or product showcases. This provision would create a pathway for micro dispensaries to engage with the community and contribute to the growing cannabis culture in Maryland.

The inclusion of micro dispensaries in cannabis events aligns with the intent of Maryland's social equity program by providing us with opportunities to connect with consumers, build our brand, and generate revenue. Without such opportunities, micro dispensaries risk being excluded from critical market-building activities that are essential for long-term success.

Ember's participation in cannabis events would allow us to demonstrate our commitment to quality, safety, and community engagement. Events also provide an ideal platform to educate consumers about our products and services, strengthen partnerships with other businesses, and promote the broader acceptance of cannabis in Maryland.

We urge the Committee to consider these recommendations and ensure that Senate Bill 215 provides micro dispensaries with equitable access to on-site consumption establishments and cannabis events. Thank you for your attention to this matter. I am available to provide further information or participate in additional discussions as needed.

Sincerely,

Taylor Green, J.D., M.B.A  
Chief Operating Officer, Ember  
tgreen@emberdmv.com