



March 3, 2025

Honorable Chair Senator Pamela Beidle
MGA Senate Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

SB894 - Office of Social Equity - Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund - Advisory Board and Modifications

Favorable with Amendment

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and distinguished members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The Office of Social Equity respectfully submits this testimony for Senate Bill 894 – *Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund - Advisory Board and Modifications*.

The Office of Social Equity supports this legislation, which strengthens the administration and oversight of the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund (CRRF) to ensure that it effectively serves communities disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs. I urge the committee to adopt an amendment to strike Section (b)(2)(I) on page 9, line 9, which imposes overly prescriptive restrictions on how counties may allocate these funds.

At its core, the CRRF was established to repair the harms inflicted by decades of geographic and demographic disparate enforcement of cannabis laws. The reinvestment of tax revenue into these communities is a necessary and long-overdue step toward rectifying those injustices. However, true repair must be community-led and responsive to the unique needs of each locality. While the list of allowable uses in the bill was derived from the 2023 CRRF report, we believe strongly that counties should have the flexibility to work in deep partnership with impacted communities to determine the most effective and meaningful investments.

Transparency and oversight remain critical to ensuring that CRRF dollars are spent equitably and with accountability. SB 894 appropriately reinforces these principles by requiring counties to develop publicly reviewed distribution plans, conduct stakeholder engagement, and submit annual reports on fund usage. These mechanisms will ensure that counties remain stewards of the public trust while allowing them the necessary latitude to be responsive and adaptive to the evolving needs of their communities.



A key component of this legislation is the establishment of the Community Reinvestment and Repair Advisory Council, which will play a vital role in ensuring that funding decisions align with the needs of impacted communities. By providing oversight and recommendations, the Advisory Council will help guide equitable distribution and assess whether investments are achieving their intended impact. This structure is essential to maintaining transparency, fostering accountability, and ensuring that the CRRF fulfills its purpose of repairing past harms.

Additionally, we recognize the importance of aligning CRRF resources with broader state funding initiatives that seek to address systemic inequities. Programs such as ENOUGH and Blueprint for Maryland's Future are tackling longstanding disparities in education, public safety, and economic mobility. Ensuring that CRRF investments are integrated within this broader funding landscape will help maximize their impact and avoid inefficiencies or duplication. Counties should be empowered to make these strategic connections in ways that reflect the specific challenges and opportunities within their jurisdictions.

We reaffirm the commitment to a community-driven approach that does not impose rigid limitations but instead centers the voices of those most affected by past injustices. We urge the committee to support SB894 to uphold the core principles of equity, accountability, and restorative justice.

This bill is necessary to continue to strengthen the bold vision of economic opportunity and equity established by the Cannabis Reform Act. We thank you for your time and consideration of this bill. I hope this information is useful. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact me at (443) 610-1666 or audrey.johnson1@maryland.gov or Courtney Davis, Deputy Director at (443) 610-1730 or courtney.davis@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Audrey Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Audrey Johnson
Executive Director, Office of Social Equity