

# VETERANS INITIATIVE 22

## Because We C.A.R.E

### Testimony on Maryland House Bill 0336:

TO: Delegate Luke Clippinger Chair, House Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Shanetha Marable Lewis, Veterans Initiative 22, Executive Director

DATE: 02/03/2025

BILL: HB0336

POSITION: **Favorable**

Honorable Members of the Committee,

Good Afternoon and thank you to Delegate Grammar for sponsoring this bill and to the chair Delegate Clippinger, as well as, to the members of the Judiciary Committee for allowing me the opportunity to express my organization's support of HB0336. My name is Shanetha Marable Lewis and I hold a Master's degree in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics from UMD. I am a proud Army combat veteran, and I am also the Executive Director of Veterans Initiative 22 (VI22), a 501-C-3 non-profit organization whose mission is Veteran Suicide prevention. One of the key ways we support our mission is by offering former service members free medical cannabis certifications through our partnering providers within the state of Maryland.

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

As a veteran, I took an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, including the fundamental right to bear arms. Many of my fellow service members and I have returned home with injuries—both visible and invisible—that require ongoing medical treatment. For some of us, traditional pharmaceuticals, including opioids and antidepressants, have proven to be either ineffective or riddled with debilitating side effects. Medical cannabis has provided a safe, effective alternative for managing conditions such as chronic pain, and other conditions that disproportionately affect veterans.

When I speak to veterans who consume cannabis for medicinal purposes about our organization and the services we provide, the most common reason the members of this population/demographic cite for not obtaining their medical cannabis certification is that they refuse to lose their constitutional right to bear arms. It is a travesty and quite hypocritical that the very population our government has meticulously trained to be responsible firearm owners is now told that the legal medicine they use to treat service-related injuries disqualifies them from owning or possessing a firearm.

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Despite the fact that medical cannabis is legal in many states and prescribed by thousands of licensed healthcare professionals, veterans who choose this treatment option are unfairly stripped of their right to own a firearm. This policy is both outdated and discriminatory, punishing law-abiding citizens for seeking a legitimate medical treatment that improves their quality of life.

This prohibition places veterans in an impossible position—forcing them to choose between their Second Amendment rights and their personal health. It sends the harmful message that those who seek relief through medical cannabis are unfit to exercise their constitutional freedoms, while those prescribed far more dangerous pharmaceuticals face no such restrictions.

We must recognize the inconsistency in this policy. Veterans prescribed opioids, benzodiazepines, or other high-risk, highly intoxicating medications retain their right to own firearms, yet those who opt for a safer, natural alternative are denied this fundamental right. This is not only unfair but contradicts the very freedoms we fought to protect.

A 2017 survey conducted by the American Legion found that 22% of the 16 million veterans in the U.S. reported using cannabis to treat a medical condition, and 40% of caregivers stated they knew a veteran who was using medical cannabis for relief. I am here today to advocate for our heroes at home, a unique and vulnerable population that overwhelmingly supports and uses medical cannabis. As the numbers attest to, many veterans are already consuming cannabis in some form—this bill would allow them to seek properly monitored medical cannabis treatment without relinquishing their Second Amendment rights.

What better way to honor our veterans than by restoring their constitutional right to bear arms—a right wrongfully stripped from them solely because they choose to use a legal medication? This injustice is rooted in outdated science, sustained stigmas, and remnants of reefer madness that have no place in modern policy.

I urge lawmakers to pass HB0336 and begin to work toward a solution that upholds the rights of responsible, law-abiding veterans in Maryland who use medical cannabis as part of their healthcare. Veterans should not have to sacrifice one constitutional right to exercise another.. Cannabis is medicine, and unrestricted, affordable access to it improves and saves lives. Thank you for your time and consideration.

# VETERANS *INITIATIVE* 22

## Because We C.A.R.E

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 **HB0336**.

Respectfully,

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