



**House Bill 0307
Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund – Alterations
In the Judicial Proceedings Committee
Committee Hearing on March 4, 2026
Position: Favorable**

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on HB 0307 at the request of Delegate Lily Qi.

MLA urges a favorable report on House Bill 0307. The bill proposes alterations to the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund (the Fund) that will ensure Maryland is investing in low-income communities that were historically harmed by cannabis enforcement.

The Fund was established to provide financial assistance to communities that were disproportionately impacted by cannabis criminalization. These are the same communities that MLA serves. MLA sees the results of overcriminalization in our work every day; a criminal record impacts every aspect of someone’s life: work, housing, parenting, education, securing a loan, and more. Prior to cannabis legalization, the subsequent governor’s pardon, and record sealing legislation, MLA regularly assisted individuals with cannabis charges in our expungement practice. These clients came from every low-income community in Maryland, but it was clear our Black and Brown clients were especially targeted. This plays out in the data. An April 2024 report from the Office of Policing Equity showed that while white and Black people use and sell drugs at the same rate, Black people are more likely to be arrested, incarcerated, or even reported to the police by medical providers.¹ Just because cannabis is now legal, the effect is not erased; the years of arrests and prosecutions that led to the dismantling of families and neighborhoods are still felt today. That is exactly what the Fund seeks to address.

HB 0307 provides critical guidance to counties and organizations utilizing the Fund by:

- clarifying that monies dispersed from the Fund *must* be used for specific, statutorily mandated purposes that help impacted communities. Currently the bill *allows* but does not *require* these specified uses. Allowing funds to be used for other purposes undermines the integrity of the Fund.
- centering impacted people by requiring stakeholder participation in any plans developed by participating counties. The bill narrowly tailors the definition of stakeholder as a person or organization that is from or led by the impacted community,

¹ Center for Policing Equity. (April 2024). Redesigning Public Safety – Substance Use at 3. <https://policingequity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/CPE-WhitePaper-SubstanceUse.pdf>

or a person or organization that has expertise on the impacts of cannabis criminalization. This approach gives the community a seat at the table, which makes sense; they have actual knowledge about the ways the Fund could best serve their neighborhoods.

- requiring a publicly available county plan that shows alignment with the Fund's purpose. To achieve that end, the plans must identify specific geographic areas within the county that were most impacted by cannabis enforcement and explain how the proposed use of funds would benefit those areas. This requirement places further safeguards on the funds by ensuring that county governments and community organizations know how to identify, apply for, and spend the funds appropriately.
- clarifying that the Office of Social Equity (OSE) will direct the administration of funds. This will streamline fund dispersal and make sure that OSE retains oversight of the Fund. The OSE is best equipped for this purpose, as it was created to promote equity and economic opportunity in Maryland's cannabis market.

Maryland's low-income communities, especially communities of color, have experienced chronic disinvestment. This is a long-standing and multifaceted problem that cannot be solved solely by the Fund, but it is a crucial step forward. This step can only be taken if the funds earmarked to address systemic racist and discriminatory policies are actually dispersed to impacted communities.

MLA urges a favorable report on HB 0307 so the Fund can fulfill its intended purpose and support Maryland communities that were devastated by cannabis criminalization.

If you would like additional information on this bill, or the underlying issues it addresses, please contact Meaghan McDermott, Advocacy Director for Community Lawyering and Development, at mmcdermott@mdlab.org or DiNesha Rucker, Staff Attorney for Community Lawyering and Development at drucker@mdlab.org.