



Testimony - SB 217, Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund - Alterations
Favorable

Senate Finance Committee

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Honorable Chairwoman Beidle & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents tens of thousands of workers across Maryland, including many who live in and serve communities that have borne the brunt of decades of over-policing, racialized enforcement, and mass criminalization—particularly related to the War on Drugs. Senate Bill 217 takes an important and necessary step toward repairing those harms through a restorative justice framework that centers equity, transparency, and community control.

For far too long, cannabis enforcement disproportionately targeted urban communities and communities of color, resulting in lost employment opportunities, family destabilization, economic disinvestment, and generational trauma. While cannabis legalization for adult-use in Maryland has ended many arrests, legalization alone does not undo the damage caused by decades of punitive policy. SB 217 rightly recognizes that reinvestment and repair must be intentional, accountable, and guided by the communities most impacted by over-policing.

This legislation strengthens the Community Reinvestment and Repair Fund by:

- Explicitly centering communities harmed by disproportionate cannabis enforcement;
- Ensuring funds are directed to community-based organizations with lived experience and demonstrated expertise;

- Prohibiting the use of funds for law enforcement activities, reinforcing that repair—not punishment—must be the goal; and
- Increasing transparency, stakeholder engagement, and oversight to ensure funds are used as intended.

SEIU Local 500 strongly supports the bill's emphasis on funding behavioral health services, workforce development, housing stability, youth programs, and support for individuals and families impacted by incarceration. These investments directly address the root causes and long-term consequences of over-policing and are essential to building safer, healthier, and more economically stable communities.

Importantly, SB 217 affirms that public safety is best achieved through opportunity, care, and community investment—not through continued surveillance or criminalization. By placing the administration of the Fund under the direction of the Office of Social Equity and requiring meaningful community consultation, this bill helps ensure that those most harmed by past policies have a real voice in shaping the path forward.

SB 217 moves Maryland closer to a model of justice that is restorative rather than punitive, and equitable rather than extractive. For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 217.

Thanks to Senator Mary Washington for her commitment to advancing equity and justice in Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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