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2001 Chapman Ave.
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Testimony: SB 594

Position: Favorable with Amendment

Committee: Senate Finance

Hearing Date: February 26, 2026

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Warren Lemley, and I am the President of Peake ReLeaf, an independently owned cannabis dispensary. I am here today to testify in **support of Senate Bill 594 with amendments.**

While we applaud the intent of SB 594 to modernize advertising rules, the current draft still leaves independent dispensaries with undue restrictions that do not apply to other regulated retail industries. I respectfully request the following amendments to ensure parity and operational clarity:

1. To ensure regulatory consistency and protect existing small business investments, this bill should include a **'Grandfathering Clause'** for all exterior signage installed and in compliance with local ordinances prior to the effective date of this Act. Moving forward, the State should **defer to local county or city zoning requirements** for all permanent and supplemental signage. If a sign meets established local standards for a retail corridor, it should be deemed sufficient for a state-licensed dispensary.

The necessity for clear communication is high; for years, our community actually thought we sold tea because our signage was too restricted to define our retail services. To avoid such public confusion and ensure operational safety, a clear distinction must be made between 'marketing' and **'operational signage'**—such as '21+' age-verification notices, curbside pickup instructions, and contact information. We propose a total signage allotment of **10,000**

square inches per street frontage. This provides ample space to communicate with the public without providing a nuisance, ensuring that corner-lot businesses can adequately inform their neighbors while maintaining parity with surrounding commercial businesses."

2. **Restoring Community Partnerships:** Current rules have effectively banned us from participating in community events we previously supported. Our historical community partners were disappointed to lose our contributions. We ask for language that clarifies that **sponsorship of community-based events** is permissible, provided the 85% adult-audience threshold is met from standard historical resources provided by the event organizer.
3. **Clarifying News and Editorial Content:** Regarding the new exception for news and editorial content, we request the **removal of the word "intended."** Determining "intent" is subjective and creates a legal gray area. Removing this word provides a cleaner safe harbor for licensees to participate in legitimate journalism and documentaries without fear of advertising violations.

Maryland's cannabis businesses are part of the community fabric. We deserve the same ability to identify our locations and support our neighbors as any other legal business in the State.

I urge a **favorable report on SB 594 with these necessary amendments.** Thank you.