March 2, 2020

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kessel, Representative Rebimbac, and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 16 An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis.

As you know, this legislation creates a framework for the regulated production and sale of cannabis, and importantly, it includes equity provisions to help ensure that individuals and communities that have been disproportionately affected by the “war on drugs” are able to benefit.

Enacting this bill will allow the State to implement public health and public safety standards, will help eliminate the barriers to opportunity faced by many people with past convictions for cannabis possession, and will align Connecticut’s legal and regulatory regime with an increasing number of neighboring states.

Cannabis has long been widely available. It is widely available in Connecticut today on the black market, and research shows that in recent decades its potency has been increasing. Regulating cannabis would give the State the ability to limit potency and ensure that it is not laced with other, more dangerous drugs or other substances. This bill also includes provisions to allow courts to consider the results of a drug influence evaluation on impaired drivers, and it lowers the amount of alcohol allowed in a person’s system when they test positive for other drugs.

Overall, this legislation is an important opportunity begin repairing the decades of damage the “war on drugs” has caused, particularly in communities of color. It is well established that people of color have been much more likely to be arrested for possession of cannabis, even though use rates are similar across demographics. Legalizing cannabis will not reverse racial disparities in the criminal justice system, but with the appropriate provisions for the erasure of records, this legislation provides an opportunity to begin undoing that harm.

I am encouraged that the Equity Commission this bill creates would have a mandate to make recommendations related to minority hiring, licensing, access to capital, distributing revenue to disproportionately impacted census tracts, and other factors. If this bill does become law, I hope the General Assembly and relevant State agencies will give those recommendations the very strong consideration they deserve.

Our goal should not be legalization of cannabis alone – it should be just legalization with appropriate regulation, with a strong focus on public health and safety, and with a focus as well on repairing the damage of a long legacy of racially disproportionate drug enforcement. S.B. 16 does a great deal to advance those goals, and I encourage the members of this Committee and the General Assembly to support this legislation.

Sincerely,

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