Testimony of

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SB 16 An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis

Thank you Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and members of the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 16 An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 919 supports the legalization of recreational cannabis in Connecticut with the addition of labor peace agreements as a condition of cannabis licensure and renewal.

UFCW Local 919 is headquartered in Farmington, Connecticut and has contracts in various industries representing 8,000 members. Nationally, UFCW represents over 1.3 million hard-working men and women who work in highly regulated industries including the emerging legal cannabis industry. Wherever cannabis is legalized, the UFCW is committed to building family sustaining jobs and a strong, diverse and skilled workforce.

Labor peace agreements protect businesses, workers and consumers, and are an effective regulatory tool for the state. A labor peace agreement is an agreement between an employer and a bona fide labor organization in which the labor organization agrees to not strike, boycott, or picket and the employer agrees not to interfere with efforts by the labor union to organize workers. At its core, these negotiated labor peace agreements create an orderly and fair process for workers to decide whether they want or don’t want representation.

Labor peace agreements can help address the existing disparities in the cannabis market by providing equal opportunities for women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, veterans, and people with disabilities to own businesses or work within the industry. Access to representation helps ensure that a broad range of workers can benefit from the fledgling industry, especially workers from communities that have been disproportionately impacted by cannabis prohibition in the past.

For too long, communities of color have suffered as a result of top-down policy making that is disconnected from lived experiences. This is especially true for communities that have experienced extreme sentencing and racial profiling as a result of the criminalization of
cannabis. To truly end cannabis prohibition, Connecticut must take steps to redress the harms of decades of over-policing, criminalization, and incarceration of people of color that resulted from cannabis criminalization. The political will and financial resources mobilized in the War on Drugs to put people in jail must be matched with equal resources to create an equitable new industry. To fulfill the promise of this industry for impacted communities and to lead nationally in a just transition, Connecticut leaders should consider how cannabis jobs can improve the lives of the families who were impacted by a failed and brutal cannabis prohibition. The political will to end cannabis prohibition must include taking the questions of race equity, harm, and redress seriously.

Unions and front-line cannabis workers can be important partners in equitable hiring and worker organizations can be important institutions for establishing hiring centers and training programs that ensure diverse, skilled and long tenured workforces. But first we must decouple the new industry from an unjust criminal justice system and ensure that workers can organize without interference.

UFCW supports proposals that incorporate equity and inclusivity into cannabis legalization policy. A 2017 survey found that only 19% of cannabis related business owners were nonwhite. A significant reason for this is lack of access to capital in communities of color. Connecticut policymakers should create a program to help support minority owned businesses have access to the industry; ensure application fees are affordable; include labor and minority caucus representation on the Cannabis Equity Commission and use cannabis tax revenue to fund community reinvestment programs for communities hit hardest by the war on drugs. Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker recently signed model legislation into law that calls for 25 percent of all revenue from regulated marijuana sales to fund the “Restoring Our Communities” grant program, which would be used to repair communities most harmed by “discriminatory drug policies.”

The nascent Connecticut cannabis industry presents an unparalleled opportunity to build a new kind of industry for Connecticut, one that redresses historical and continuing harms and gives workers an opportunity to exercise workplace democracy to improve both the industry and Connecticut communities. Policymakers must embrace principles of equity and workplace democracy from recruitment to career advancement in order to build a shared culture of equality. One strong mechanism to do so is the labor peace agreement.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

1 "Since 1971, the war on drugs has cost the United States an estimated $1 trillion. In 2015, the federal government spent an estimated $9.2 million every day to incarcerate people charged with drug-related offenses—that’s more than $3.3 billion annually." Center for American Progress, "Ending the War on Drugs: By the Numbers," June 27, 2018. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/criminal-justice/reports/2018/06/27/452819/ending-war-drugs-numbers/ Furthermore, “Black people are approximately four times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than are white people—a disparity that increased 32.7 percent between 2001 and 2010—with far more severe penalties.” Altaf Rahamatulla, “The War on Drugs Has Failed. What Next?” Ford Foundation Equal Changes Blog, March 23, 2017, https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equal-change-blog/posts/the-war-on-drugs-has-failed-what-s-next/