Testimony Supporting *Senate Bill No. 16 An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis.*

**Testimony for the Judiciary Committee Hearing Consideration of S.B. No. 16**  
**March 2, 2020**

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and all distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Krystina Jackson, I am a resident of Hartford, and currently earning my Masters in Social Work at the University of Connecticut, with a focus in policy practice, international issues and human rights. I am testifying today in support of Senate Bill Number 16, An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis.

According to the Office of Legislative Research, 11 states have legalized the possession of specified quantities of cannabis for recreational use by adults aged 21 and older. A large majority of these states, however, have legalized in a way that did not seize this moment to ratify the damage that has been done to Black and Brown communities during the still ongoing War on Drugs. Overpoliced communities, lack of access to opportunities, and unfair sentencing have only exacerbated the school to prison pipeline, and have fragmented families in a way that will be damaging for generations to come. Here and now, we have an opportunity to not just bring a multi-billion dollar industry to Connecticut, but ensure that the people at the center of prohibitions shortcomings, are at the heart of the solution and allocating a large majority of the revenue to community restoration in areas that desperately need it.

As a macro social worker, pursuing social justice for those disenfranchised by our society is a necessity in everything that I do. As a constituent, I expect the elected officials of our state to approach their work in the same way. In May of this year, my degree will declare me an expert on social determinants of health, and based on the data, it is the health of our urban communities that is most at risk. If there is a concern about youth prevention, it should be centered on the young people who are now institutionalized because of the possession and distribution of this drug. Now that the state plans to collect tax revenue using the same method, there is a debt to be paid and reconciliation to be made in our communities.

Right now, Connecticut has a chance to embrace equity and further its lead in criminal justice reform. When it comes to youth prevention, we must think of dismantling the way cannabis has enabled the school to prison pipeline, and stop using fear mongering with parents, as extensive research done by the Marijuana Policy Project shows teen use of cannabis declines in states that have legalized. Similarly, when we think of addiction, we should look to studies that confirm marijuana use as an effective source of treatment for opioid abuse, not to mention a large amount of Connecticut residents that have found relief from chronic pain, cancer, and certain mental illnesses with access to medical marijuana treatment. As someone who formerly held a medical
marijuana card in this state, but could not renew it due to high costs, legalizing this drug would send a message that access to any realm of healthcare should not be based on wealth. Lastly, I ask you to cautiously consider the effects of over-regulation of cannabis and how this could continue to negatively affect our communities. Data from the National Drug Policy Alliance shows trends in arrest rates of people of color as still significantly higher than that of their white counterparts, even in states that have legalized the retail market.

I urge you to support this bill by ensuring that it is not just a stepping stone towards racial equity and economic prosperity for our communities, but an act of true reparative justice at work. Citizens who once felt they must turn to the Black market to support themselves and their families, should be granted automatic expungement indefinitely and not face further persecution or wait in line for their freedom. Shaleen Title, Commissioner of the Cannabis Control Commission in Massachusetts has stated publicly that Massachusetts has made progress by legalizing marijuana, but the legal industry is still majority white and there has yet to be much progress with expungements. Ms. Title has also created the Ten Elements of Equitable Cannabis Policy, that I strongly urge you to review before voting on this bill as is.

Given the progress that has been introduced with Clean Slate legislation, CT has an opportunity to implement and support a more inclusive society. By ensuring historically overpoliced communities gain access to the legal market as full participants from entry level to owner, CT can lead a national reform to bring equity to its local communities and encourage one of the most diverse workforces in the country. Thank you for considering my points here today and allowing me to share my story. I have faith that the conversation around cannabis will remain centered on equity and restorative justice for our Connecticut citizens and those returning home.