Statement of the Connecticut Medical Cannabis Council
Senate Bill 16
Judiciary Committee
March 2, 2020

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas and members of the committee:

The Connecticut Medical Cannabis Council (CMCC) would like to offer brief comments on Senate Bill 16, An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis.

CMCC is comprised of the four licensed medical marijuana producers in the state. We produce the medical marijuana that patients purchase from medical dispensaries, formulating a wide variety of different products. They are verified and validated by independent third party laboratory testing; our pharmaceutical grade medicines have helped Connecticut patients treat a variety of serious and debilitating ailments.

At the outset, we would like to acknowledge this committee and the General Assembly’s fine work on the medical marijuana program in recent years. We also want to thank Governor Lamont for proposing Senate Bill 16 and for the Department of Consumer Protection’s very professional manner in which they have implemented the program.

When we testified on this issue one year ago, there were 33,000 patients enrolled in the medical marijuana program. This month there are 40,000 patients, an increase of 21 percent. The program is growing and more and more patients are being helped with their debilitating medical conditions.

We continue to be fully focused on doing what we can to retain Connecticut’s reputation as having the very best medical marijuana program in the nation. To that end, Senate Bill 16 contains three enhancements to the program that we believe make sense.

- First, the commissioner will review the possibility of eliminating fees on patients and caregivers.
- Second, the commissioner will look for ways to “maintain and prioritize” access to the medical marijuana program in view of competition that would come from the adult use cannabis side.
- Third, the bill makes it clear that medical marijuana products are exempt from the 6.35 percent sales tax.
We look forward to seeing Commissioner Seagull’s recommendations on the first two issues when she reports to the General Assembly next January.

Turning to the issue of adult use cannabis, we appreciate Governor Lamont’s efforts that have culminated with Senate Bill 16 and for his concern over issues of social equity and justice. We would like to make the following points:

- Whatever program is designed should parallel to the maximum possible extent the medical marijuana program because it is straightforward, well-regulated and streamlined.

- The four current licensed medical marijuana producers have the capacity and expertise to start this program and help make it a success. We can work with, and mentor, equity applicants, product manufacturers and the retails stores who enter the market.

- An excessive level of taxation on the adult use product could make it very costly, driving consumers to the cheaper black market. We suggest a single tax at retail of 20—25 percent, so that the levy is transparent and competitive with Massachusetts.

- On July 1, 2020, the possession of 1.5 ounce of cannabis by a person 21 or older is decriminalized. But, two full years elapse before retail sales begin on July 1, 2022. During that time, purchasers will get their cannabis from a neighboring state or the black market. Either way, Connecticut loses out. We have an idea of how to address this “gap period” if you would be interested in hearing it.

Thank you for considering the views of the Connecticut Medical Cannabis Council on Senate Bill 16.