Dear Senator Winfield, Rep. Stafstrom and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I testify today in favor of Governor’s bill #16 to end the prohibition on cannabis. As City Council President of Bridgeport CT and a representative of Bridgeport’s East Side, I represent a community that has been severely impacted by the ‘War on Drugs’ and the failed policy of Prohibition. At one point in the nineties, jersey barriers were erected to block off large parts of the East Side from the rest of the city isolating residents from even basic law enforcement protection.

Cannabis prohibition has failed communities like Bridgeport all across Connecticut. It has torn apart millions of lives with arrests and the collateral consequences of convictions, put cannabis consumers and workers in danger, and failed to stop cannabis use.

The governor’s bill presents a far more sensible approach to cannabis: reasonable regulation to protect public health and safety and a focus on repairing harms done by prohibition.

The governor’s bill to end cannabis prohibition would replace the unregulated illicit market with a taxed and regulated system with licensed cultivators, retailers, manufacturers, micro-businesses, and testing laboratories. It has a strong focus on public health, public safety, and social equity.

The legal cannabis industry represents a great opportunity to help balance the detrimental effects of the war on drugs by creating an equal playing field for all people to benefit from the changing legal landscape.

Unfortunately, currently there are few minorities in the cannabis industry. Heavy regulation, high cost of entry and information gaps hinder minorities from entering the industry as owners, employees, and patients & consumers. Removing these barriers to embrace all communities will increase the cannabis industry’s growth, contribute to its economic development, and display the positive impact of cannabis medicine.

The Governor’s bill takes a positive step forward to remove these barriers and create opportunity for minority businesses. It also directs revenue to
those communities most negatively impacted by the 'War on Drugs'. I support this legislation and I hope that you will too.

Submitted by City Council President Aidee Nieves, Bridgeport