Dear Sirs and Madams,

My name is Catherine and I have lived in Connecticut for over 30 years. I am a chef, an entrepreneur, a cannabis business consultant, a medical patient, and most importantly an advocate for medical patients and recreational consumers alike.

I am writing today to voice my support for the legalization of Cannabis in Connecticut done in the proper way.

I believe that we as advocates, and you as legislators have a larger obligation to do right by the citizens of Connecticut. 80% of the state currently supports legalization, and in order to ensure fairness, stability, robustness, diversity, and equity to the market, it is imperative regulations be set up correctly from the beginning.

Many of the states that have legalized cannabis already have done so ignorantly, blindly, against general advice, and against the wishes of its residents.

Some of the ways we can screw up legalization (and these items are taken directly from legalized states elsewhere in the US) would be imposing sky high taxes on retail sales, allowing town "host agreements" that essentially amount to extortion, setting exorbitantly prohibitive market entry costs, lack of diversity in product and dosage of product, lack of diversity in entrepreneurship, not allowing social consumption spaces or licenses, not expunging records for those previously convicted of cannabis related offenses, allowing ludicrous zoning restrictions, allowing individual towns to use old propaganda rhetoric to scare their constituents into edging
out legal businesses, allowing outside entities to consume the legal market over local and longtime residents, and most importantly not allowing home grow rights. Allowing these to become part and parcel of a legalization bill all contributes to the exact opposite of what legalization is trying to create.

A safe, regulated, informed, diverse population safely consuming cannabis in numbers and locations enough to drive revenue in the state. This can ONLY be done by solving the above, and not allowing others mistakes to become ours.

It is also imperative to consider how the revenue will get funneled back into the state of Connecticut. It is my strong recommendation that the revenue from legalization DOES NOT go back into the general fund. The revenue should be held separate and used for very important causes prior to anything else. I ask you to consider how can we help our most vulnerable residents, before ourselves, and that hopefully will lead to the right and just decisions about what to do with potential legal cannabis revenue.

Many advocates, myself included, would like to see the money help pay for cannabis oversight committees, help pay for a percentage of licensing and application fees for disadvantaged and disproportionately impacted individuals, towards drug education and prevention classes for schools and communities, towards combating the opioid epidemic, subsidizing mental health care, drug rehabilitation programs, as well as towards helping to pay reparations or for the legal fees for expungement of records of anyone convicted of a previous cannabis offense.
We as a state should be doing a better job helping to empowering those who have been at a disadvantage because of their race, gender, orientation, socioeconomic status, sex, creed, or incarceration history. The market is not saturated with those who can afford to throw millions of dollars at the process without blinking an eye. It is saturated with people of every walk of life wanting to create something for themselves, and give back in immeasurable ways to their communities. Understand that this crucial diversity in entrepreneur will help create jobs, raise economic performance, and ultimately improve the quality of life of hundreds of thousands Connecticut residents. We can only have a full, robust, inclusive participated market in Connecticut, if we work towards creating that fairness and equality through community empowerment and incentive programs. I am asking you to consider help us bring everyone to the table, everyone deserves a seat.

I ask you also to take a look into the broken medical program as it stands currently in connecticut. **First and foremost, the medical patients of connecticut NEED cannabis grow rights.** There are only four licensed producers in the state. These four manufacturers do an absolutely atrocious job stocking consistent strength and sufficient quality medication for the residents who crucially rely on this to get by every day. Connecticut also just added a bunch more dispensaries to come online, without actually fixing the supplier issues. This is one of the first rules of supply chain, you do not promise out more than you can manufacture and in connecticut we have absolutely put the cart before the horse in this respect. **We also need to look into the insane cost of getting licensed and recertifying throughout the years as a medical patient in connecticut. Combined with the exorbitant price of the medication itself, it truly shows how**
broken our medical system is. We need to fix all the above as part and parcel of a legalization bill. There should be no annual cost to recertify as a medical patient in Connecticut, and once certified ONCE, that should be good for life. None of the qualifying conditions are temporary ones, and to ask patients to continually prove they are sick is just a money grab. If you are going to exorbitantly tax legal cannabis, please allow the medical patients to retain their cards for life without having to recertify, and to grow their own medicine at home without fear of prosecution. We should openly allow for all styles of medical consumption, including gummies and flavored items. After all, these items would be allowed in a legal marketplace.

In short, I believe legalization of Cannabis will be tremendously beneficial for the state of Connecticut and its citizens. It is imperative however, that we create a “red tape free”, inclusive and robust market, free of many of the constraints other legalized states are bound by. This includes freeing ourselves from bad, ill-considered policies, educating towns and residents versus spreading fear-based rhetoric about cannabis, and ensuring we are using most if not all the revenue to reinvest back into crucial programs, initiatives, and groups within the state.

It is imperative to do this correctly, fairly, and equitably from the beginning.

Also in regards to how it is regulated, it should be regulated like alcohol. Liquor stores are freely allowed to advertise in their windows, in circulars, with multiple flavors, styles and storefronts. There is no exorbitantly prohibitive cost to dispense liquor in this state, and we should allow Cannabis to be consumed and regulated in the same manner.
So, I ask each of you to consider three questions while voting for and creating rules for legalizing cannabis in the state of Connecticut.

- Is this (taxes, limitations on businesses, prohibitive rules and regulations) going to help the state and its citizens as a whole (the short answer is NO! We need a diverse and robust marketplace)

- Is this fairly set up, straightforward, and approachable at every level to the average citizen through regulations

- Have we done enough to be progressive and improve upon where other states have fallen short?

Thank you for your time and consideration for the legalization of cannabis. I appreciate all consideration you give to allowing medical patients additional freedoms as well.

*Catherine R. Norwalk, CT, 06851*