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

My name is Kebra Smith-Bolden and I serve as a Registered Nurse in Connecticut. I am the CEO of CannaHealth a Holistic Cannabis Health and Wellness Center, and the Market Leader for Women Grow CT, a networking organization that empowers Women to become entrepreneurs in the Cannabis Industry. I also serve as the President of the Connecticut Chapter of Minorities for Medical Marijuana and as the Co-Chief Nursing Officer for the Steering Committee for Huerfano County, Colorado’s Faris Green Campus project to Fight Opiate Addiction with Cannabis.

I testify today in support of Governor’s Bill #16. The time is now for Connecticut to regulate Marijuana and end its prohibition. Legalization, by going beyond decriminalization, empowers regulators to implement commonsense measures to control the cannabis industry, educate the public and consumers about possible risks, and thus advance public health. Regulation ensures cannabis products are tested for safety before they reach the hands of consumers. It also allows regulators to mandate warnings about the health risks of cannabis. Connecticut’s current failed prohibition policy provides no public health or public safety regulation or oversight. It is time for this to change.

The facts are clear, Marijuana is safer than Alcohol. It is far less toxic, less addictive, and less harmful to the body than alcohol. Unlike alcohol, it does not contribute to violent and reckless behavior. It is irrational to punish adults and make them criminals simply for using a substance that is far safer than alcohol.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that more than 30,000 annual U.S. deaths are attributed to the health effects of alcohol (i.e. this figure does not include accidental deaths). On the other hand, the CDC does not even have a category for deaths caused by the health effects of marijuana. A study published in Scientific Reports in January 2015 found that the mortality risk associated with marijuana was approximately 114 times less than that of alcohol.

People die from alcohol overdoses, but there has never been a fatal marijuana overdose. The official publication of the Scientific Research Society, American Scientist, reported that alcohol is one of the most toxic drugs and using just 10 times what one would use to get the desired effect could lead to death. Marijuana is one of – if not the – least toxic drugs, requiring thousands of times the dose one would use to get the desired effect to lead to death. This “thousands of times” is actually theoretical, since there has never been a case of an individual
dying from a marijuana overdose. Meanwhile, the CDC attributes more than 1,600 U.S. deaths per year to alcohol poisoning.

Alcohol is more addictive than marijuana. According to a 1998 report by Drs. Jack E. Henningfield of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and Neal L. Benowitz of the University of California at San Francisco, alcohol’s addiction potential is significantly greater than that of marijuana based on a number of indicators.

A comprehensive federal study conducted by the National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine arrived at a similar conclusion: "Millions of Americans have tried marijuana, but most are not regular users [and] few marijuana users become dependent on it ... Although [some] marijuana users develop dependence, they appear to be less likely to do so than users of other drugs (including alcohol and nicotine), and marijuana dependence appears to be less severe than dependence on other drugs.

Regulating and taxing cannabis sales will also generate significant new revenue for our state and local governments. Under the Governor’s bill, funds will also be directed to the communities that have been most devastated by cannabis prohibition. For decades, minority and low-income individuals have been disproportionately affected by marijuana enforcement and the war on drugs. It is fitting that they be the ones who benefit from cannabis tax revenue following legalization.

For all of these reasons, I strongly support passage of Governor’s Bill #16. I hope you will join me and the majority of Connecticut residents to support legalization this year.