Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
March 2, 2020

Senate Bill 16, An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis

Good morning Chairmen Winfield and Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Carl Tirella and I’m the General Manager of Acreage Holdings, which operates three medical cannabis dispensaries here in Connecticut: Prime Wellness of CT in South Windsor, Thames Valley Relief in Uncasville, and Compassionate Care Center of CT in Bethel. I am here with our chief pharmacist, Al Domeika, to testify on Senate Bill 16, An Act Concerning the Adult Use of Cannabis.

Connecticut should be proud of its medical cannabis program—which has seen demonstrable improvement and growth since its enactment in 2012. The legislature had the insight and foresight to create a program that first and foremost prioritizes the health and wellness of patients and we are encouraged by continual improvements to the program. At Acreage, it is our number one priority to advocate for policies that increase patients’ accessibility and affordability. To that end, we support any measures that expand qualifying conditions, encourage medical professionals to participate in the program, education and research initiatives, and efforts to reduce costs.

We also support enacting prohibition and legalizing the adult-use of cannabis. Acreage is encouraged by Connecticut’s efforts and leadership toward creating an adult-use cannabis market that is inclusive, diverse, and competitive. As the Connecticut legislature works to enact SB 16, we also urge you to keep the medical cannabis program and its patients in mind.

We believe it is critical to protect, if not expand and improve, medical cannabis programs when a state is contemplating the legalization and regulation of adult-use cannabis. The most important policy to protect medical programs when implementing an adult-use market is to permit medical cannabis operators in the state to co-locate adult-use and medical product at their dispensaries. Indeed, every state that has implemented adult-use programs with an existing medical program has allowed co-location in an effort to protect patients’ access.

Connecticut should be wary of limiting or prohibiting co-location as it will drive patients to seek product from the most accessible location, which will often be a purely adult-use dispensary without appropriately trained staff or pharmacists on site. Another benefit of co-location is that many adult-use consumers are actually self-medicating with cannabis use and will also have access to trained staff and pharmacists in the co-located dispensaries which often encourages increased patient registration and participation, and more appropriate product use.

Notably, Section 21 of SB 16, would grandfather the current cannabis producers into the adult-use program, allowing them to operate in both the medical and adult-use space. We respectfully
request the legislature consider similar language to apply for the existing medical dispensaries. While the current bill contemplates a modified licensing process for existing dispensaries and a future determination regarding co-location, we strongly urge the legislature to consider more prescriptive language ensuring medical dispensaries’ participation in the adult-use market and the co-location of cannabis products.

By allowing the current medical dispensaries to participate in the adult-use program, the state can preserve and protect patients’ access, utilize entities that are vetted and regulated to ensure public health and safety, realize tax revenues right away, and encourage customers to utilize the regulated markets.

With these changes, we would strongly support SB 16. Thank you for your consideration, I am happy to answer any questions.