



To the honorable Chairman Winfield, Chairman Stafstrum, Vice Chair Kassar and Blumenthal, and Ranking members Kissel and Fishbein, and all of the members of the Judiciary committee. Thank you for taking the time today to hear my testimony in OPPOSITION to SB888.

My name is Jason Ortiz and I serve as the Political Director For CURECT, a statewide grassroots organization that mobilizes communities of color toward equity in the cannabis industry and justice for all communities impacted by the war on drugs. I also serve as the President of the Minority Cannabis Business Association(MCBA), a National Trade Association of People of color interested in Entering the Cannabis industry. I am a Father, a Hartford resident, and someone who was arrested at the age of 16 and charged with possession of cannabis while in High School. That experience would change the course of my life and lead me to this moment where I can voice my perspective on why the current legalization bills being presented are insufficient to meet the task of truly doing right by communities that have been devastated by over policing.

The 3 major planks of cannabis equity are Criminal Justice reform, Community investment, and Ownership and Licensing. For my testimony today I will be focusing on the shortcomings of the criminal justice sections but to be clear SB888 fails to hit the mark on all 3.

When discussing equity in criminal justice reform we have to start at the foundation that ***the state of Connecticut has waged and continues to wage a racist war on black, brown, and poor communities in Connecticut.*** We continue this war despite countless studies proving racist intent and impact of our policies. Despite countless hearings where hundreds if not thousands of CT residents have come forward and asked for the war to stop. Despite our nation rising up in revolt against racist policing we are still to this day arresting and incarcerating people in our communities over a plant.

To further specify where the mark is, we can review the policy under 3 lenses: Decriminalization, Expungement, and re-entry support.

Decriminalization of cannabis crimes.

- SB888 Does not decriminalize homegrow
- SB888 Does not decriminalize sales
- SB888 Does not decriminalize over 2.5 ounces

Expungement

- SB888 Does not expunge cultivation records
- SB888 Does not expunge sales records
- SB888 Does not expunge over 4 ounces

Re-entry support

- SB888 Does not let anyone out of prison
- SB888 Does not provide any pathway to prosperity
- SB888 Does not protect young people from the school to prison pipeline

SB888 fails to achieve the bare minimum of equity goals in that it does not decriminalize most cannabis crimes by its glaring omission of the legalization of home cultivation. No longer risking arrest for growing a plant in your home must be at the center of what legalization is. If we can still go to prison for growing it, it's not truly legal.

SB888 also fails to expunge records related to cultivation or sales crimes. How can we justify licensing billionaires to sell thousands of pounds of cannabis but not expunge records for selling even 1 gram? This gross hypocrisy lays the foundation for a program distrusted by the community.

Lastly I want to highlight that we are still using a punitive approach to educating our youth. We have the opportunity to transform our society into ending a war on ourselves, and finally stop criminalizing our young people for their curiosity. We must take an approach of educational empowerment for our young people but adding protections, not punishments for those with problematic drug use, and honest science based education for those looking to better understand the world around them.

And it must be said, legalization does not lead to increased youth use. A recent CDC study stated quite clearly: "Despite legalization of the retail sale of marijuana to adults in Washington in 2012, evidence from the biennial Washington State Healthy Youth Survey indicates that the prevalence of past 30-day marijuana use among students in grades 10 and 12 began to decline that year. The decline continued in 2016 among grade 10 students and did not change significantly among grade 12 students. This decline or absence of change in youth marijuana use after legalization of retail sales to adults is consistent with trends reported in Colorado and Oregon,^{††} states that legalized adult retail sales of marijuana in 2013 and 2014, respectively.¹















We can do better than SB888. I encourage all members of the committee to either heavily amend or outright oppose this bill without serious improvements in equity, justice, and compassion.

Thank you for your time.

Jason Ortiz
President, Minority Cannabis Business Association

¹ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6839a3.htm?s_cid=mm6839a3_w

CT CANNABIS LEGALIZATION BILLS SIDE BY SIDE

	HB6377	SB888
Home grow		
Priority licensing for equity applicants		
Taxes earmarked for impacted community investment		
Jobs program for those with adverse criminal histories		
Labor peace agreements		
Support for our Native Tribes		
Protections for students and parents		

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