



Hello distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees committee, my name is Jason Ortiz. I serve as the President of the Minority Cannabis Business Association. The Minority Cannabis Business Association (MCBA) is the first not for profit business league created to serve the specific needs of minority cannabis entrepreneurs, workers, and patients and consumers. I am also a Hartford Resident, UConn graduate and someone who was arrested for cannabis possession at the age of 16.

I encourage members of the committee to support HB6377 because it provides a robust process for achieving true social equity in the cannabis industry. **HB6377 is one of the few bills to address the totality of discrimination inherent in the war on drugs.** Yes, criminal justice penalties are severe and must be addressed, but the war on our communities was far more pernicious and comprehensive than criminal justice alone. HB6377 addresses issues in housing, education, employment, and in parenting.

It focuses first on fact finding, using our great universities and colleges to help with an equity study to ensure that our policy is driven by data. Policies as important as these deserve a full accounting of what has been done, and what can be done moving forward. We can not move forward without grappling with the war on drugs being one the most damaging public policies in world history. Countless lives lost, millions incarcerated, thousands of families destroyed and whole communities over policed, abused, beaten and economically exploited for generations. All at the hands of the CT State Government. Our state played a part in destroying so many lives, and we can not forget that as we decide what is or is not sufficient justice for our community.

Then it leans all the way into the beautiful future we can build together, when we put equity and economic justice at the center of our public policies. HB6377 lays out a framework for a legal cannabis industry that will create high paying union jobs, empower hundreds of entrepreneurs, and invest millions in the communities most impacted by the war on drugs. It does all of this while leaving room for the judiciary committee and finance committees to add their respective expertise for a full cannabis legalization package that can and will pass if put up for a vote.

And lastly but importantly, [A recent University of connecticut study put the projected revenue over 5 years at near 1 Billion dollars.](#) HB6377 will generate even more.

I would like to state some highlights then focus on **3 areas** I believe are unique to HB6377. **A workforce development** pipeline, an emphasis on **protections rather than punishments for our youth**, and an embrace of **cooperation with and respect of our tribal nations**.

For a broad overview, here are 10 highlights of [HB6377](#):

HB6377 starts with a truly thorough accounting of the damage done by the war on drugs, and uses data to determine how reinvestment will be most effective.

- Sec. 6. Equity Task Force: Issuance of Recommendations

HB6377 focuses on workforce development creating thousands of jobs and mandating no less revenue go toward a permanent “pipeline to prosperity” focused on empowering those with adverse criminal histories.

- Sec. 2. Funding for Modern Cannabis Workforce Development
- Sec. 20. Control Commission Trust Fund

HB6377 ensures our community members with adverse criminal histories cannot be subject to discrimination for past offenses.

- Sec. 12. No Cannabis-Related Criminal Offense May Be a Basis of Exclusion by the Control Commission.

HB6377 raises the importance of our moral obligation to our Native American neighbors.

- Sec. 32. Deference to Tribal Sovereignty

HB6377 addresses protections for vulnerable communities like students, parents, and those in qualified public housing.

- Sec. 28. Protections for Family and Children.
- Sec. 29. Protections Related to Educational Institutions, Financial Aid, and Student Loans
- Sec. 30. Protections in Housing.
- Sec. 31. Protections Related to Qualifying Public Housing

HB6377 employs strong protections against corruption by public officials.

- Sec. 24. Public Employee Anti-Corruption.
- Sec. 25. Municipal Anti-Corruption.

HB6377 includes provisions for home cultivation.

- Sec. 14. Personal Use and Cultivation.

HB6377 creates 6 license types: Cultivation, Retail, Manufacturing, Testing, Delivery and Micro(Craft). Equity applicants are given a 1 year head start before Multi-state Operators can commence sales.

- Sec. 13. License Types and Priority Issuance of Licenses to Equity Applicants; Limitations on Transfers of Ownership.

HB6377 creates a clear partnership between the University of Connecticut as a support system for equity programs in the forms of research and expertise. This partnership will benefit equity applicants but also university students will gain experience in a cutting edge field dealing with contemporary problems.

- Sec. 27. Research Partnership with University of Connecticut.

HB6377 sets a framework for creating interstate compacts, Tribal cannabis commerce, and prepares CT for federal legalization.

- Sec. 23. Interstate and Inter-jurisdiction Compacts.

[A "Pipeline to Prosperity"](#)

HB6377 has a special emphasis on workforce development targeted to those with adverse criminal histories related to cannabis. **This bill would create an investment over 5 years to ensure that our communities are trained to be owners and employees of the new cannabis industry.** By partnering our equity operators with the expertise of our vibrant labor unions we can better ensure our equity operators will be successful.

The employment protections in section 3 are vital to ensure workers who consume cannabis are not unfairly discriminated against for legal off duty behavior. **Employers should not have a right to dictate our off hours**, when they are not paying for our time.

This bill still allows employers to set the terms of the workplace as long as those terms are transparent and everyone is made fully aware of them at all times. Section 3 merely protects employees from being targeted for their legal cannabis use.

[Section 29: Protections rather than punishments for our youth](#)

Year after year we hear from those who are worried about our youth but all they provide as alternatives are more punishments. HB6377 outlines protections for young people, and workers of all ages, against unnecessary disruptions in their lives. Let's provide protection and support for our students rather than more punishment and isolation.

If a young person has an addiction issue the worst thing we can do is isolate them from their friends and family and simultaneously throw them into the legal system. I found out first hand when at the age of 16 I was arrested for simple possession, thrown out of school and forced into the criminal justice system. It did nothing to curtail my cannabis use but it certainly made graduating from high school much harder.

What does work is education. Organization's like Students for Sensible Drug Policy, whom you will hear from later, are invaluable assets into understanding how we can best empower youth to avoid adverse relationships with drugs. Let's listen to them and create protections with their input, and by giving them all of the information they need to be responsible members of society.

[Embrace of cooperation with and respect for our Tribal Nations.](#)

Our Native American neighbors have been tremendous partners for our great state and we must always treat them with the utmost respect and with an offer of cooperation and mutual benefit. Section 32 outlines a principle of allowing Tribal entities to determine the policies that best empower their community to thrive.

Our equity operators would benefit greatly from partnerships with our Tribal neighbors. The ability to engage in commerce together is step 1 toward another strong partnership between our great state and the tribes of our area.

In addition we have ensured that tribal members can access the grants and other services available to our equity applicants for anyone wishing to enter the cannabis industry as an owner or employee.

For all of these reasons I humbly request and encourage all members of the Connecticut state Legislature to co-sponsor and ultimately pass HB6377. Thank you.