

Chris O'Brien

From: Eric Larson <noreply@adv.actionnetwork.org>
Sent: Tuesday, April 23, 2024 11:57 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Support Bill #7855: Cannabis Justice

Committee Finance Clerk,

I am an Associate Professor of Crime and Justice Studies, and I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill #7855, which seeks to address critical issues within the current RI Cannabis Act. As a concerned resident of Pawtucket, I firmly believe that this legislation is essential for the well-being and advancement of our community.

House Bill H7855 is vital because it aims to reshape the cannabis industry to benefit businesses, disproportionately impacted areas, and local municipalities alike. It is troubling that despite legal cannabis sales exceeding \$100 million in Rhode Island in 2023, not a single dollar went to low-income communities, as highlighted by the RI Cannabis Act itself. This is unacceptable, especially considering the emotional, psychological, and financial harms that family members, especially children, and communities of those arrested or incarcerated due to cannabis-related laws, have suffered. According to a 2011 news article by GoLocalProv, Rhode Island annually spent \$27 million to support a failed War on Drugs.

As someone who recognizes the harm caused by the criminalization of cannabis, I strongly advocate for redirecting cannabis taxes towards communities most impacted by the War on Drugs. This bill proposes a tax structure that would significantly increase funding for the Social Equity Assistance Fund and the Disproportionately Impacted Areas Fund, from \$3.06 million in 2026 to \$21.7 million. This increase in funding is crucial, especially as the number of cannabis licenses permitted in Rhode Island grows. By adopting an in perpetuity model, these funds can grow to several hundred million dollars in future decades, continuously supporting economic empowerment in disproportionately impacted areas.

While some may be concerned about competition within the cannabis industry, it is important to consider whether there has ever been fair market competition in Rhode Island's cannabis sector. For a decade, three dispensaries maintained a firm grip on the industry, creating an environment that favored the wealthy. The Cannabis Policy Coalition provides solutions that encourage true fair-market competition while ensuring the Social Equity Assistance Fund can

offer financial assistance to business owners impacted by the War on Drugs. This includes advocating for licensing fees and penalties to remain in the fund and proposing that 50% of the adult-use tax be split equally between the Social Equity Assistance Fund and a proposed Disproportionately Impacted Areas Fund.

I urge you to support House Bill H7855 and to encourage your colleagues to do the same. The well-being of our community depends on the decisions made by our elected representatives, and passing this bill is a crucial step toward economic growth. Please consider the positive impact this legislation will have on Rhode Island and its residents.

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