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S.54 Testimony
House Government Operations Committee
Room 49, Vermont Statehouse
April 17, 2019 11:10 am

Good morning Madam Chair and House Government Operations Committee. For Committee record, I am Mark Hughes, Director of Justice For All and Coordinator for the Racial Justice Reform Alliance. Please accept this testimony for your consideration as you move towards committee discussions and mark up of S.54 this week. I have asked repeatedly for an opportunity to testify on the social and racial justice implications of regulating and taxing marijuana. Those requests have gone unanswered.

Our initial analysis is based upon national and statewide arrest and incarceration rates of black people for “marijuana” and other low-level drug possessions. Many are aware that this has contributed to a larger “war on drugs” resulting in an unprecedented racially centric mass incarceration in the United States. Today more black men are under the control of corrections than there were under slavery in 1850. In further analysis we conducted careful review of the three reports produced by the “Marijuana Commission”, after the statewide tour. There was no consideration given to any plans to attempt to compassionately address matters of restoration, fairness, or equity in any of these reports. Our testimony in Senate Judiciary yielded little in adopting language to address this blind spot.

Please consider the following recommendations

1. § 841 Cannabis Control Board – Clarify that the person should have racial justice background and reference to the “Board”
 - a. (c)(1)(C) - “...background in systems of ~~social~~ racial justice and equity issues”
 - b. (c)(4) – “Remaining members of the ~~Commission~~ Board”
2. § 901 (d)(2) – Develop and tier based upon socio-economic status
3. § 903 (a) – Disaggregate women from minorities and add ownership
4. § 909 Fees (c) – A process for reduced or waived fees shall be produced to eliminate barriers to entry for socio-economic disadvantaged applicants.
5. Sec. 8 Implementation – Preference should be given to individuals who have historically been disproportionately impacted by cannabis prohibition.
6. § 955 Registration Fees – Include reductions and waivers

7. § 973 Dispensary License – Equity requirements
8. Sec. 20 18 V.S.A. § 4230 Cannabis – Address severity of criminal penalties.
Consider tax implications

It is incredibly important that you consider the rich social and racial historical context when considering the prospect of regulating and taxing “marijuana” and our ethical responsibility to try to right that, which was wronged. I ask that you consider the recommendations provided and **consider attaching H.478 (Reparations Task Force)** to S.54 as you complete your work with a strike all amendment. This will enable folks to do the work required to further investigate any additional actions that could be taken to address this and other existing and emerging policy. It will also send a clear message from the House Government Operations Committee – No taxation or regulation of cannabis without reparations.

Numerous folks have emailed, left messages with the Sargent at Arms and called you, even on your personal phones, all requesting your consideration. Other folks have testified and over 200 people have signed [this petition](#) all agreeing that it is time to stand for that which is right an not place profit before people.

Thank you for your service.

Respectfully,

Mark Hughes
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