

Testimony on S. 278 - An act relating to cannabis  
House Government Operations and Military Affairs

Land Access and Opportunity Board  
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S.278.

The Land Access and Opportunity Board was created to improve access to woodlands, farmland, and land and home ownership for Vermonters from historically marginalized or disadvantaged communities who continue to face barriers to land and home ownership. This is challenging and complex work. I would like to start by sharing LAOB's touchstones and invite you to hold these touchstones during our time together today

- Listen generously. Speak your truth from your heart & mind.
- Make the way we work together an example of what's possible.
- Trust that we all hold a piece of the puzzle & we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture

The LAOB was created to help the State of Vermont understand and remove the barriers that disadvantaged communities face in achieving land and home ownership. Our communities face barriers that are the compounding result of generations of unjust and discriminatory laws and practices, including the War on Drugs.

Discriminatory policing of cannabis has undermined our communities' economic stability. Economic instability causes housing instability with damaging impacts for all of us. As the **Vermont Department of Health found in its 2024 State Health Assessment:**

**“Lack of affordable, safe, and accessible housing leads to housing insecurity, mental health deterioration and financial strain.** Key housing issues include substandard housing environments due to neglected maintenance, the high cost of housing, a limited number of contractors available to make repairs, landlords raising rents while not maintaining properties, and economic support, policies, and initiatives for affordable housing that are not addressing the acute needs. Housing discrimination further limits access for many marginalized communities.”

Since its creation, the **Cannabis Control Board has recognized the “disproportionate impact of the historically government-led policies that fueled the economic oppression of Black and Brown people for generations and continues to disadvantage these individuals as well as Indigenous people, people of color, and other historically marginalized groups.** The Board aspires to build an equitable and accessible program in order to mitigate the past harm inflicted by the prohibition of cannabis.”

However, in its 2024 Act 166 Report, the CCB found that:

“Given the inherent barriers to accessing the industry and the on-going challenges to achieving sustainable success, the CCB and the Cannabis Advisory Committee concluded that the Social Equity Program alone is inadequate to mitigate the harm caused by historic drug policies and has called for the creation of a community reinvestment fund in prior legislative reports,”

and recommended dedicating 25% of the Cannabis Excise Tax to the Land Access and Opportunity board for community reinvestment.

When S.278 passed out of Senate Economic Development Committee it contained an appropriation for the Land Access and Opportunity Board. We support the **CCB Act 56 Report finding that “From a public health and prevention lens, directing cannabis excise tax revenues to provide grants and technical assistance for affordable housing, land access, and community-led development would help address upstream determinants of health—stabilizing families, reducing stress and insecurity, and creating safer, more resilient neighborhoods”**

The LAOB has done the ground work and is able to deploy funds into programs and projects that have been vetted and developed by our communities in collaboration with agencies and service providers to heal the very real harms of housing and economic insecurity experienced by our communities, who have been negatively or disproportionately impacted by cannabis criminalization.

The LAOB is interested and ready to work actively with the Legislature, the CCB, Vermont Department of Health and other parties to ensure that we are building a cannabis marketplace that addresses our communities’ core needs for stable housing, land access and opportunities. Housing, access, and opportunity are key drivers of both public health and thriving community economies.

Here are our recommendations on S.278

## **Sec. 27a. COMMERCIAL CANNABIS COMPACT; INTENT**

### **Commit to economic equity**

In the face of an impending interstate cannabis marketplace, it is even more important than ever to ensure that we protect Vermont’s interests related to the cannabis market. LAOB supports and encourages that maintaining this important language in Section 27b § 834. COMMERCIAL CANNABIS COMPACT:

(j) An agreement shall include appropriate provisions reflecting Board programs and efforts to promote the inclusion and support of individuals and communities in the cannabis industry who are linked to populations and neighborhoods that were negatively or disproportionately impacted by cannabis criminalization.

As we face an expanding regulated cannabis marketplace we must not further entrench the disproportionate impacts on communities who were previously criminalized and economically harmed by this now legal product. Provisions should

- Prioritize investments in housing and economic opportunities for communities harmed by cannabis criminalization.
- Holistically review and develop protocols for expungement, including how expungement will be made available for those no longer residing in Vermont.

### **Invest in Vermont’s Craft Marketplace**

It is now more important than ever for Vermont to strengthen the business viability opportunities for our local businesses, otherwise we are at risk of overrunning our local businesses with larger

scale, more highly capitalized businesses from out of state. Across most industries, Vermont businesses have a very hard time competing on economies of scale because of our population size, our climate, cost of energy, regulatory environment, and diverse and dispersed natural resources. We can look to Vermont's other agricultural markets and see that our businesses thrive when we support craft, artisan brands that have strong direct relationships with customers. Direct to consumer marketing is a proven strategy that builds higher brand value with the impact of differentiating from commodity markets and increasing the value proposition of the entire marketplace. Direct to consumer marketing improves the competitive advantage of our small, craft producers, and promotes more equitable access to market for producers and consumers. Please consider:

### **Section 6**

- Adding onsite direct sales allowances to Section 6.
- Increase delivery permits to 30 to bring proportional parity to what is written into the event permits.

### **What is missing from S.278**

S.278 is missing some important language. Please prioritize this important work and reach out to us so we can work together to address:

- Appropriations
  - Cannabis Business Development Fund
  - Investments in the LAOB to improve housing and economic opportunities for communities harmed by the criminalization of cannabis
- Medical System
  - We are falling behind in making important legislative updates to our medical marijuana system. Many people with disabilities and chronic medical conditions rely on medical marijuana to manage chronic conditions that are difficult or dangerous to treat with other pharmaceuticals. We stand with and support the patients and providers who are asking for a Symptom Relief Oversight Committee to be included in this bill.

Thank you. We are available for further testimony if it is helpful to your committee. You are welcome to contact LAOB's Co-Directors:

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