

Dear house finance committee,

I'm Austin Briggs. Founder of the Cleveland School of Cannabis, and I want to speak about some specifics relating to the jobs and equity fund in issue 2 that was supported by voters, but seems to be at risk in the proposed revisions.

In December the Cleveland School of Cannabis became the first and only cannabis school in the world to be recognized by the US department of education. We've been serving the Ohio medical cannabis program since 2017 and of the 6500 employees over 1000 of them are graduates from our programs. I grew up in Cleveland heights Ohio, and I went to Kent state university for college. I'm a home grown entrepreneur. I spent 7 years in California, where I was introduced to the cannabis, before moving back to Cleveland to start CSC in hopes to assist the State in launching an effective cannabis program.

We are a State approved career school and In addition to workforce development we continuing education and consulting work and can help resolve a lot of issues that are arising from a lack of education. We currently train the Florida board of health's Medical Marijuana division and do continuing education for a number of licensees in and outside of Ohio. So, before I get into the specifics, I would like to introduce myself and let you know that you and your affiliates may lean on us through this process to fill some of the gaps where you may be uninformed or need guidance.

My specific request today is related to something many of you may not have thought about. It's very rare that an industry this size is born out of thin air. But when it does, the success of the industry is largely dependent on the size and quality of its workforce. Workforce development is so crucial, that the federal government pours billions of dollars every year into workforce development in Ohio, through the WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) funds that are distributed by county and allocated to support job training in growing industries. Early in our journey, we were approached by representatives from Ohio means jobs and the VA who had people coming to them to get educated on the cannabis field. In both cases the Ohio offices wanted to support their needs, and were very friendly and accommodating. At the time, in 2018, there was no written language prohibiting them from supporting these careers pathways, other than the fact that we were not yet accredited with recognition from the US department of education. We looked at our organization and realized that we would not be able to survive long term without students having access to traditional financial support like WIOA funds, so we embarked upon a 5 year journey to obtain accreditation. However, in 2021 and 2022 directives were handed down to both the VA and Ohio means jobs that funds could not be allocated to cannabis education. Accreditation or not.

I say that to say this. There are a lot of organizations that could benefit from these taxes and many of them have very worthy causes. But as Tim Johnson pointed out yesterday, many of these organizations already have multiple sources of funding. Workforce development has NO OTHER funding sources. The cannabis tax is the only fund that

can be allocated to workforce development in the cannabis industry. We have no idea what an industry this size will look like without any workforce development support because there are no examples. On the low end this program will support about 40,000 new jobs over the next 8 years and 62,000 jobs on the high end. Either way, this makes the cannabis industry one of the top two fastest growing job sectors in the State. The impact of workforce development is well known and there is no need to dig into the statistics on that. Workforce development is the one thing that is guaranteed to pay for itself in lower turnover, increased efficiency, increased wages and increased productivity throughout the supply chain. I ask that the house helps to keep a significant portion of the jobs and equity fund and to allocate a specific part of that fund to education, jobs, and workforce development specifically for the cannabis industry because if that distinction isn't made, the funds may fall into the laps of organizations that are prohibited from supporting cannabis education and workforce development.

When we talk about social equity, we often focus too much on the social equity licensing and we forget the over 90% of the inequity in this industry is on the employment side. We must create equal access to education and jobs and we must develop an educated workforce for the cannabis industry in Ohio. There are many ways to allocate these funds which I won't get into here, but I just want the house to understand that workforce development dollars can not be sourced from federal funds like WIOA and that this fund will be solely responsible for making sure Ohio has an educated and equitable workforce. Thank you.