

**Testimony for Adult Use Cannabis law
December 12th, 2023**

**Ally Reaves, Owner/CEO
Midwest CannaWomen**

Chair, Vice Chair, Ranking Member, and members of the committee

Paragraph 1: Introduction and purpose

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ally Reaves (she/her)

- a. I am a passionate leader, businessowner, advocate and humanitarian. I love to help empower and love people. In May 2017, I held the position as the Admissions Officer for the Cleveland School of Cannabis. I created the role and enrolled over 92% of their student body for their Cleveland, Columbus and online platforms for 2 ½ years. I work hard and I sacrifice for the bigger picture. I have always believed in the power of working together for the bigger picture. In October 2017, I created my first ancillary business, Midwest CannaWomen to create solutions in the Ohio Cannabis industry. Minorities and Women are our focus. We strive for equity, inclusion, diversity, ownership/entrepreneurship, and equality in the Cannabis space. Also, we create environments for B2B connections. I have been blessed to have helped and introduced the Cannabis industry to so many businesses, politicians, physicians, and the community. We focus on providing consulting, entrepreneurship, B2B networking, expungement, cannabis education, and employment. I am here today to advocate for social equity and automatic expungement for Ohioans. I work hard and sacrifice for the future.
- b. Midwest CannaWomen creates BOP/DOC approved projects to connect the industry with the community to educate and provide resources for inclusion in the cannabis industry. We strive to continue to connect B2B for the Ohio Cannabis market. Midwest CannaWomen has created over 20 or more projects in the market. In 2019, I met Nickole Ross, Owner/COO of Noohra Labs and her sister, Neariah Ross, Operations Manager of Noohra Labs, and we began to work together to support the Ohio Licensed operators for B2B networking and create pathways and economic empowerment into our communities across Ohio. Our projects include Statewide Career Fair/Expungement Clinics in Cleveland, Dayton, Columbus, and Cincinnati for 3 years and counting; Ohio Midwest CannaFest event, which is a safe outdoor event to connect the industry to the community and provide free resources; at Rid All Greenpartnership Farm in Cleveland, Ohio for 5 years and counting.

- c. The focus of Midwest CannaWomen is to provide equitable resources, expungement, cannabis employment, and affordable Ohio MMJ Patient Visits through an exclusive partnership with Releaf Clinics for \$50 through our ongoing State approved project, Patients Come 1st Tour.
- d. State your purpose: I came to testify so that my voice can be heard with the new Adult Use Cannabis law in Ohio. I have been blessed to have supported/helped the so many people and companies in the Cannabis industry/community. I am excited and support the growth of the industry. I have had several leadership roles in the industry. I have changed my business focus to cater to the solutions for the industry. I support the industry operators. I support the community. Also, I support independently owned operators; like Noohra Labs. I feel they should have equitable resources and opportunities like the rest of the operators to have a fair chance to do business. I was the Sales Director as an independent contractor for Noohra Labs from April 2022 until June 2023. We must work together.

I feel the same way about small businesses that are ancillary/supply chain companies in Ohio. I have endured with creating different projects and opportunities because I had to follow the strict laws. We all want fair business practices and opportunities, tax breaks, etc... The reality is we need to work together to find solutions to diversify the Cannabis industry as whole. This is not just an Ohio Cannabis issue; this happens across the U.S. Ohio needs to be a Leader.

- e. I am concerned about the adoption of the new laws regarding the loss again of social equity in Ohio Cannabis industry. I believe and support equitable laws and programs, and expungement in Ohio cannabis program. Also, as what happens in other states that become Adult Cannabis Use, where is the automatic expungement procedure that is supposed to go into effect once the law is active. I would like to discuss some options and ideas in a separate meeting by providing data from the work by Midwest CannaWomen that might be able to work with the new developing programs of the cannabis laws.

Paragraph 2: Personal connection/story

Since 2017, I have worked with Ohio Licensed operators, State and City officials, collected signatures to decriminalize cannabis in Cleveland in 2019. Also, I collected signatures for Issue 2 bill. I work with Cleveland City officials with expungement of minor cannabis charges like City Council President Blaine Griffin and Cleveland City Law Prosecutor Aqueelah Jordan and James Levin of Legalworks to create better opportunities to connect clients who need access to expungement. I continue to partner with the city officials, and Nickole and Neariah with Noohra Labs with statewide expungement/career fairs. I have done everything that I can to support Ohio Cannabis industry and community. Now, that the law has changed, there should be funding and programs to support efforts for equity and inclusion in the communities across Ohio. I want to be a part of the development.

- a. I am here to just paint a picture of what empowering our communities looks like. If there is not an automatic expungement of Cannabis records in Ohio now that it is an Adult Use state, the rise of arrest of possession will grow resulting in a negative impact of the Adult Use back to the communities who are impacted the most by the system. With the new laws, Cannabis convictions will continue to bring barriers for inclusion. According to the National Incident-Based Reporting System, Ohio arrest for possession dropped in 2020 to 5,554 but as of 2022 rose back to 7,432 equaling 40.78% arrests in Ohio. Cleveland has expunged 4,477 minor cannabis charges but needs to connect with the clients.
- b. If there are no programs for social equity or jobs for Ohioans, the underrepresented communities will have less of advantage and Ohioans will begin to move into surrounding states with less restrictive and more inclusive laws. We need to work together to diversify the industry.

Paragraph 3: Connect to broader community impact

- a. I am a Black woman from Cleveland, Ohio. If the Adult Use law was able to provide automatic expungement of minor cannabis records, equity, and programs, it would provide vast opportunities for Ohioans in my communities to build Ohio based cannabis companies and create equitable and generational wealth in our communities for years to come in the Cannabis industry.
- b. We need to continue to break down barriers and create pathways and entry points for the underrepresented communities in Ohio. Based on my research and data along with being in the community doing the work, it makes sense to provide communities for Minorities and Women with equitable resources and opportunities for inclusion in the Ohio Cannabis industry. There are so many Ohioans who have left because of the lack of opportunities. To have a profitable Cannabis industry, we need to be represented. It is the key to success.

Paragraph 4: Reiterate purpose/call to action

- a. I am here to testify that social equity, jobs, and automatic expungement should be a part of the new Adult Use law in Ohio. Also, I support the Ohio cannabis industry and feel that we all need to work together. The Cannabis space in Ohio needs to work towards diversification. I feel the focus should be improving the economic growth and diversifying the Cannabis industry in Ohio. The new laws need to be focused on the future of Cannabis and our new world.
- b. I ask that you amend the law and include social equity, jobs, and automatic expungement into the new Adult Use Cannabis law. It is time.

CLOSE:

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.