

Matthew Hyde

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6/4/2025

Chair Thomas, Vice Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Matthew Hyde, representing Civics Cannabis and the Cannabis Consumers Coalition, and I rise in respectful opposition to Substitute Senate Bill 56.

While we all share a responsibility to ensure the safe, equitable implementation of cannabis reform, Sub. SB 56 undermines that goal by disregarding the very public will be expressed in Issue 2 and replacing it with a fragmented and punitive approach. Instead of building on the foundation Ohio voters supported, this bill injects confusion, restricts access, and adds criminal penalties that do little to advance public health or safety.

First, education must remain a cornerstone of our cannabis framework. Yet, this bill repeals funding and mechanisms that would support public awareness, youth prevention, impaired driving reduction, and expungement assistance. Without proper education and outreach, we risk substituting progress with confusion and harm. Education—not fear or overregulation—is how we promote responsible cannabis use. Legalization is not a finish line—it is a responsibility. Rather than empowering citizens with knowledge, Sub. SB 56 reverts to outdated enforcement tactics.

Second, this process requires cooperation. I appreciate and thank the members of the committee that have reached out. Cannabis policy should be shaped by inclusive dialogue with patients, consumers, cannabis industry members, public health experts, and local leaders. However, this latest substitute version still goes backwards, eliminating pathways for new licenses, increasing penalties, and adding layers of restriction without the stakeholder input this process deserves. It strips local control while offering little in return to communities on the front lines of reform and reinvestment. That is not cooperation, it is an exclusion.

Lastly, coordination is essential. Ohio has a chance to set a national standard model that merges regulatory oversight with economic inclusion, health safeguards with personal freedom. But that requires all voices at the table: patients, caregivers, veterans, small businesses, farmers, and communities most impacted by the war on cannabis. One that integrates adult-use and medical cannabis systems, supports small businesses, and maintains clear, fair regulations. But this bill creates unnecessary complexity, dual standards, and inconsistent oversight that make coordination difficult across agencies, providers, and jurisdictions. Sub. SB 56 closes doors where it should open them.

We do not need to begin from scratch, we have an outline, it is called Issue 2. We need to work together—to educate, to cooperate, and to coordinate—to refine the will of the voters into a functional, inclusive framework. Sub. SB 56, once again, does not achieve that.

I urge this committee to reject this bill in its current form and recommend it to a process that reflects the voter approved Issue 2.

Thank you. I will take any questions you may have.