

**Opponent Testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 56**  
*Submitted to the Ohio House Judiciary Committee*  
*June 3, 2025*

**Cat Packer**

Director of Drug Markets & Legal Regulation  
Drug Policy Alliance

[cpacker@drugpolicy.org](mailto:cpacker@drugpolicy.org)

Chairman and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong opposition to Senate Bill 56. This legislation disregards the will of Ohio voters and dismantles core provisions of Issue 2—the marijuana legalization initiative overwhelmingly approved in November 2023.

Ohioans made clear their intent to end marijuana prohibition, create a fair and regulated marketplace, and reinvest cannabis tax revenue across Ohio communities—particularly those disproportionately impacted by criminalization. SB 56 undermines that mandate in two critical ways: (1) by reintroducing unnecessary and harmful criminal penalties for lawful cannabis activity, and (2) by eliminating the Cannabis Social Equity and Jobs Fund along with other tax allocations specifically outlined in Issue 2.

**SB 56 Re-criminalizes Legal Cannabis Activity**

SB 56 reinstates criminal penalties for non-harmful cannabis-related behaviors that voters explicitly chose to legalize:

- Adults would be prohibited from sharing cannabis outside of their primary residence—a restriction that is both impractical and discriminatory, especially given that no such limitations exist for alcohol.
- Sharing homegrown cannabis, even for personal or compassionate purposes, could be classified as felony trafficking.
- Adults may be penalized for possessing or using cannabis legally obtained in another state, such as Michigan—creating arbitrary enforcement risks unrelated to public health or safety.
- The bill imposes a burdensome “open container” framework for cannabis edibles, tinctures, and topicals, requiring they be stored in a trunk or locked space during transport—even for passengers.
- It severely restricts where cannabis can be consumed, including in private settings such as hotel rooms, vacation rentals, or outdoor patios—imposing regulations stricter than those for alcohol or tobacco.

These measures reflect a punitive, prohibition-era approach to cannabis that Ohio voters decisively rejected. If enacted, they would reintroduce criminalization and increase inequitable enforcement, particularly in communities that have historically borne the brunt of cannabis-related policing.

## **SB 56 Eliminates the Cannabis Social Equity and Jobs Fund and Redirects Tax Revenue**

One of the most alarming aspects of SB 56 is its elimination of the Cannabis Social Equity and Jobs Fund—an initiative central to Issue 2 and essential to fulfilling the measure’s stated public purposes.

Issue 2 clearly articulated four public purposes for adult-use cannabis legalization:

1. Reducing illegal marijuana sales and providing for a safer, regulated cannabis product;
2. Limiting the transportation of out-of-state cannabis into the state;
3. Providing key funding to support social equity, job creation, host communities, cannabis research, and proper oversight; and
4. Improving social equity outcomes to redress past and present effects of discrimination and economic disadvantage.

Eliminating the Cannabis Social Equity and Jobs Fund directly contradicts two of these four purposes and strips Ohio of its primary tool for building a more just and inclusive legal cannabis market.

Issue 2 also acknowledged the lasting harms of cannabis criminalization and the importance of addressing them. It recognized:

- The need to reduce barriers to ownership and participation in the cannabis industry for those most impacted by enforcement;
- The long-term consequences of drug convictions on housing, employment, and economic mobility; and
- The emotional and financial toll these convictions have had on families and entire communities.

To that end, the Cannabis Social Equity and Jobs Fund was designed to support:

- Business and employment opportunities for minorities, women, veterans, people with disabilities, and individuals impacted by criminalization;
- Criminal justice reforms, including expungement, bail, parole, and legal aid;
- Community-based initiatives like youth development, education, violence prevention, and entrepreneurship; and
- Substance use education, prevention, and treatment.

SB 56 would eliminate all of these investments. Instead, it proposes to redirect cannabis tax revenue into the state’s general fund—without any guarantee of transparency, fairness, or reinvestment. Some officials have even floated using these funds to build new jails—an outcome that stands in direct conflict with what voters intended.

While SB 56 temporarily maintains a reduced allocation for host municipalities, its long-term effect would be a sweeping disinvestment from communities that voters intended to support—leaving Ohio less fair, less safe, and less prepared to equitably regulate cannabis.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

SB 56 represents a fundamental reversal of what Ohio voters demanded: legalization, fairness, and community reinvestment. It reintroduces criminal penalties for lawful conduct and eliminates the core programs and funding that would make cannabis reform safe, just, and equitable.

I urge this committee to:

1. **Remove all new criminal penalties and restrictions that would re-criminalize lawful adult cannabis activity; and**
2. **Restore the Cannabis Social Equity and Jobs Fund and the tax revenue allocations as approved under Issue 2, in accordance with the will of Ohio voters.**

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.

**Cat Packer**

Director, Drug Markets and Legal Regulation  
Drug Policy Alliance