

Dr. Bridget Cole Williams Testimony - SB 86

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Blackshear and all members of the Senate General Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Dr. Bridget Cole Williams. I am an Ohio resident, a board-certified family physician, author, medical cannabis specialist and a local business owner. I completed my undergraduate degree at University of Michigan and earned my medical degree from Michigan State University - College of Human Medicine. I also completed my residency in Family Medicine at the Cleveland Clinic and was the chief resident during my time. I am currently a Forbes Health Advisory Board member, recognized CBD expert, sought-after national speaker, business owner and author of the bestselling book series "Courage in Cannabis". Additionally, I am the Medical Director of Care Alliance Health Center in Cleveland and an adjunct professor at John Hopkins University.

Beyond my work in the medical field and by utilizing my education and credentials, I have co-founded businesses in the beauty and lifestyle space and hemp-infused beverage space. My most recent business, The Blossom Bar, has allowed me to expand my focus to wellness-driven, alcohol-free experiences for my customers. The Blossom Bar is a mobile mocktail bar specializing in adaptogens, nootropics, and hemp-derived cannabinoids, offering unique functional beverages for events, private parties, and pop-ups. We currently reside at The Hidden Leaf Café, a vegan anime-inspired restaurant. My business has thrived by filling a need that is prevalent in the community, giving my customers alternatives to alcohol.

In the medical space, I witness firsthand how many of my patients depend on hemp-derived products as a safe, effective, and natural alternative to pharmaceuticals. These individuals, many of whom hold medical cards, are often apprehensive to enter a dispensary. Rather than going to dispensaries, they rely on local businesses where they can purchase these products. Restricting access would severely limit treatment options for thousands of Ohioans who have found relief through local hemp-based therapeutics.

My businesses serve as a resource for individuals seeking alternative wellness solutions. If this restrictive legislation is enacted, countless patients and customers, many of whom already face significant health challenges, will be left without access to the products that improve their quality of life. Ultimately, they are more likely to choose questionable online products from other states than travel to dispensaries.

Responsible businesses in this industry are not opposed to regulation—we welcome it. However, we strongly oppose an outright ban that restricts consumer access solely to dispensaries. Let me emphasize, regulation is necessary, and many business owners already adhere to high standards that we would fully support being codified into law. For example, we advocate for common-sense regulations, such as a minimum purchase age of 21+ with strict ID verification. We also believe in clear, transparent packaging that accurately identifies products and provides consumers with access to lab testing results. These measures promote safety, accountability, and consumer confidence.

As with any industry, bad actors exist but responsible businesses outnumber them. If this legislation passes, it will harm reputable businesses while failing to address real concerns. Limitation doesn't solve the problem; it merely creates a space for an illicit market to grow. As an industry, we are in favor of working with legislators on thoughtful and effective regulation.

I am here to help shed light on why small businesses that sell hemp-derived products are so important to the local economy and to their consumers. Restricting the sale of these products to a small number of licensed dispensaries throughout the state will have a devastating impact on thousands of Ohio small businesses, employees and customers. I urge lawmakers to consider the real human impact of these restrictions on Ohioans and to prioritize local businesses and patient access to safe and effective hemp-derived products. Imagine if all the over-the-counter products at your local pharmacy disappeared and only prescription medications were available. It changes how we access the products that affect our comfort, health, beauty and wellness. That is the impact of this legislation. Consider Education, not limitations. With that, I

respectfully ask you to oppose SB 86 and support the thousands of hardworking Ohioans who depend on this industry, both as business owners and as consumers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.