



## **Representative Casey Weinstein**

*The Ohio House of Representatives*

House Finance Committee

December 6, 2022

Good morning Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer, and Ranking Member Sweeney. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on House Bill 382 with my joint sponsor, Representative Upchurch.

HB 382 would allow for adult use, cultivation, and possession of cannabis in Ohio. This bill would also allow for the possession of marijuana paraphernalia and expunge conviction records for all offenses made legal by this bill. Anyone under the age of 21 would still be prohibited from purchasing or using recreational cannabis products, and retailers would be required to restrict access to all persons under the age of 21.

I want to focus on a few key reasons why legalization makes sense for our state *now*, including economics, equity, and safety. First—and most relevant to this committee—our state is actively losing dollars to neighboring states with recreational programs and missing out on hundreds of millions of dollars in potential tax revenue. Last year, Michigan saw more than \$1 Billion of recreational cannabis sales, bringing in nearly \$150 million in tax revenue. Our bill would levy an excise tax of 10% on a marijuana retailers' gross sales, investing critical dollars directly into our communities. 35% of revenue would go to maintenance for our roads and bridges, 35% to our K through 12 education systems, and the remaining 30% to the municipalities and counties that host dispensaries. For the first two years of the program, \$20 million would also be designated annually for clinical trials researching the efficacy of marijuana in treating veterans' medical conditions and preventing veteran suicide.

Besides direct tax revenue, legalizing adult-use marijuana will provide Ohioans with new entrepreneurship opportunities and ease workplace participation issues in our labor force. Arrests for marijuana possession have decreased dramatically in the last few years, but [thousands of Ohioans](#) are still arrested annually. This legislation will expunge records for non-violent offenders, allowing greater workplace participation in a shrinking labor force.

And despite what some say, states with legalized marijuana are not more violent or more addicted, and legalization has not been shown to have any correlation to higher crime or more traffic accidents. In fact, decriminalizing marijuana would allow law enforcement to focus on

solving and preventing actual crime. In 2019, the FBI reported over 650,000 marijuana arrests and citations—more than all violent crime combined. Additional FBI data showed that police only cleared 33% of sexual assault cases, 31% of robberies, and 14% of burglaries. After marijuana was legalized in Colorado and Washington, a higher percentage of crimes were solved.

As for the common “gateway drug” myth, The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that the majority of cannabis users do not go on to use more dangerous drugs. On the contrary, studies are being done to see if cannabis can be used to help people struggling with opioid addiction, as well as on the benefits cannabis has as a pain reliever in place of opiates. The de-stigmatization—as well as critical funding dollars—that comes with legalization will only serve to advance this research.

Under HB 382, the Department of Commerce would be directed to oversee commercial marijuana distribution and sales, including licensure of marijuana retailers and microbusinesses and safety compliance facilities. This bill still allows municipalities to restrict the type and number of marijuana establishments operating within city limits and requires the Department of Commerce to adopt rules related to the licensure of marijuana businesses, as well as the safe cultivation, processing, and distribution of products.

This legislation does not make any changes to the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program, but by passing this bill, we will allow more Ohioans to take advantage of cannabis’s medicinal properties. The medical program is helping thousands of people, but for many it’s too expensive and often inaccessible. Of the 140,000 patients approved for medical marijuana, 18% have never taken advantage of the program due to either physical lack of access to dispensaries near their homes or unaffordable pricing. Legal home cultivation will allow Ohioans who need this medicine to grow it themselves.

We’ve reached a point where a majority of states have medical programs, and nearly half have recreational programs. Action is being taken at the federal level and a citizen-initiated statute is most likely coming to the ballot in Ohio next November. We have the opportunity to take legislative action now to craft a program that works for our entire state, rather than wait. Ohio is ready for this, and if we don’t act now, we will be left behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and we will now take any questions.