

***Testimony in Favor of HB1449, February 28, 2020 by Joe Gaskins
Chairman of the African American Cannabis Association***

Good evening, Madam Chair Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk and distinguished members of the Health & Government Operations Committee. I am Joe Gaskins, Chairman of the African American Cannabis Association. It is my pleasure to testify before you today.

We are in support of House Bill HB1449 with Amendments. Under the new bill sponsored by Chairman of the Maryland Black Caucus Darryl Barnes, who has championed the cause for minority ownership and co-sponsored by fellow delegates Nick Charles, Andrea Harrison, Diane Fennell, Frank Conaway and Julian Ivy. We believed that the only way to level the playing field in an industry where MBE and WBE's, have virtually been shut out is through legislation.

In the Beginning it seemed to be a great idea... legalize cannabis for medical purposes. Collect taxes for the State's Coffers while drying up the illegal market. Everyone wins, why not? Unfortunately this was a nonstarter for Maryland's businesses, especially minority and women owned businesses located within the State, who were not included in the smoke filled rooms of decision making.

A few, well connected, wealthy white men orchestrated a heist...out of the gate. Who could challenge them? They had the money, if need be they could certainly influence politics with it. This was the makings of a Jesse and Frank James saga, outlaws who by the way, farmed commercial hemp in Kentucky during the mid-1800's.

There is still time to change the ending of this horror story and right the wrongs of this State's past history; where the system has unfairly targeted and unjustly criminally prosecuted the African American community. This legislature could allow those individuals to compete in a burgeoning billion dollar industry by passing HB1449, with Amendments.

"This is not the perfect solution, but it's the best solution," "The free enterprise system will allow everyone who is qualified to have a chance at getting their piece of this lucrative pie rather than restricting competition to a select few, chosen individuals who will have a monopoly on the market for generations under the present conditions."

We as a people can make a difference! I urge you to Support HB1449 with Amendments!

Sincerely,
Joe Gaskins