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HB 857 - Public Safety - Certification of Police Officers

Dear Chairman Clippinger & Members of the Committee:

Following the launch of Maryland's medical cannabis program, it is important to review and update state policies and procedures to identify and correct any potential issues relating to this new industry in our state. I bring before you today a bill that would do just that - and passed this Committee and the House of Delegates last session

We are all aware of the discrepancies between state and federal law on the legalization –or lack thereof – of marijuana. For the most part these discrepancies have no meaningful impact if an individual or business abides by the rules and regulations established by the LaPrade Commission. However, as local police departments across the state have found, these discrepancies have created a situation that can hamper their ability to recruit and hire otherwise qualified police officers who have been employed as private security at Maryland's licensed cannabis facilities.

For the purpose of recertification, the Maryland Police Training Commission views these individuals as potential violators of federal law related to the distribution of narcotics. Obviously, they have not broken the law or participated in distribution outside of the established process provided for by state law and regulations.

While the Police Training Commission does have an established waiver process in place for these individuals – and the departments wishing to hire them – to appeal any negative determination based on this prior employment, this process is lengthy, can be costly, and delay or impede getting qualified, capable law enforcement officers on the job.

As local departments, in rural areas and in some of our largest metropolitan agencies, are struggling to recruit and retain certified police officers, we should be doing anything we can to remove roadblocks. This bill would establish, within reason, that employment at a licensed cannabis facility in Maryland does not constitute the illegal distribution of narcotics for the purpose of police officer certification.

This is a common sense bill that simply modernizes and clarifies state policy and regulations and will ultimately benefit local law enforcement. Further, the bill as amended has passed the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and is on third reader before the Senate.

I would ask for a favorable report on HB 857.