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People of Color Release First-Ever Marijuana Bill Prioritizing Industry Equity

Model Legislation Provides a Roadmap to Repair Harms of the Drug War

Washington D.C. -- A group of cannabis business owners, policy makers and activists has drafted the first-ever cannabis bill that emphasizes ensuring that communities that have been harmed by racial disparities in drug law enforcement can benefit from growth in the cannabis sector, through business ownership, employment and tax appropriations. At least two policymakers already plan to champion the bill into enactment.

Led by the Minority Cannabis Business Association (MCBA), the only trade association in the cannabis industry that stands for business owners of color, the bill addresses barriers in existing legalization laws that have kept communities targeted by the war on drugs from participating in and benefiting from the burgeoning marijuana industry, such as restrictions that prevent people with past drug convictions from employment or applying for a business license.

Boston City Councilor at-Large Ayanna Pressley, the first woman of color ever elected to the Council, worked collaboratively on the bill with MCBA members in Boston and plans to file it with the Massachusetts legislature. She said, "If we set an example by taking intentional steps toward equity in the cannabis industry locally, we can set the tone nationally. This bill will move us beyond impassioned talking points and apologies to a policy that will right the wrongs of the War on Drugs in a tangible way. It will get us one step closer as a city and a state to ensuring equity in enterprise endeavors, jobs and wealth-creation."

Hartford, Connecticut City Councilwoman Wildaliz Bermúdez believes in legalization, but wants to make sure it's done in a way that is inclusive of all communities. "I support legalization and know it can bring in much needed revenue and economic opportunity for our cities. *How* we legalize needs to be done in a way that ensures our communities of color and women are in ownership roles and not just employees. I commend the MCBA for this monumental achievement and look forward to bringing it to council and making Hartford a welcoming space for women of color entrepreneurship."

Last fall in Washington, D.C., MCBA convened a diverse group of business owners, policy experts and activists from across the U.S. to draft a blueprint for creating a more diverse, just and equitable cannabis industry. The result of those discussions is a 27-page model bill that can serve as a guide for elected officials, advocates and entrepreneurs interested in shaping a new industry in a way that allows the



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communities who have been most impacted by the war on drugs to take steps towards prospering in the new legal cannabis industry.

An estimated 1% of legal cannabis retail dispensaries are owned or operated by people of color. Most existing legalization laws erect barriers to full and equal participation of people of color in the marijuana industry by restricting access to licensing and setting the costs of entry at an unaffordable level.

The model legislation opens the doors of the cannabis industry for people of color, outlines a process for reconciliation after a targeted war on drugs and brings the cannabis industry into partnership with the communities they serve.

In addition to creating a template of the best practices from states like Oregon, California, and Massachusetts and addressing legalization components such as removing penalties for possession, the model proposal:

- * Qualifies all previous cannabis offenses for newly legal conduct as eligible for expungement
- * Creates an Office of Justice Reinvestment to foster a diverse, lawful cannabis economics sector to ensure that revenue is directed towards communities most impacted by the drug war.
- * Creates a minority-owned business certification for the cannabis sector.

"The movement is growing," said Jesce Horton, President of the Minority Cannabis Business Association. "People of color, especially African-American males, have been put in jail and our families torn apart by the war on drugs in a vastly disproportionate manner. The cannabis plant can heal in so many ways and we feel the cannabis industry should be aligned with the same principles. This bill is a roadmap for doing so by ensuring we build a strong and sustainable industry, where diversity, inclusion and reconciliation are cornerstones."

A summary and full text of the bill is available on the MCBA Website at <http://minoritycannabis.org/model-bill.html>

The Minority Cannabis Business Association (MCBA) was founded in April 2016 and is the first 501(c)(6) not for profit business league created specifically to progress the cannabis industry by increasing diversity. Our mission is to create equal access and economic empowerment for cannabis businesses, their patients, and the communities most affected by the war on drugs. Our membership includes businesses, entrepreneurs and activists from around the country.

Media Contact:

Gabriel Pendas
Program Director, Minority Cannabis Business Association
Gabriel@minoritycannabis.org
(971) 263-4821