

Friday, October 28th, 2022

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer,

We are small business owners, entrepreneurs, and social equity licensed professionals in the legal cannabis industry. **We respectfully urge you to address the many barriers communities of color face to enter, grow, and prosper in the cannabis industry by bringing the Secure and Fair Enforcement (SAFE) Banking Act with potential restorative justice provisions for a floor vote.**

We applaud your and Senators Cory Booker and Ron Wyden's leadership in drafting and introducing the Cannabis Administration and Opportunity Act (CAOA). The CAO A would represent the most significant change to how the federal government treats cannabis. However, we recognize that the current political environment in Congress will preclude the CAO A from becoming law before the end of this year. Therefore, we ask that you champion proposals that can get the necessary bipartisan support to become law and provide small operators and aspiring entrepreneurs the relief and opportunities they need to support or launch a new cannabis business.

As you know, Black and brown entrepreneurs have long faced systemic disadvantages when launching and running a business. The legal cannabis industry is no different. While many states, including New York and New Jersey, have been deliberate in setting up a system that is equitable and accessible to the communities most harmed by the war on drugs, even entrepreneurs with special equity licenses run into obstacles, including:

- **The cost of starting a cannabis business.** These can range from \$150,000 to \$2 million due to licensing fees, inflated real estate rates, insurance, security, and regulatory requirements. In addition, many equity operators are charged exorbitant interest rates ranging from 20 to 40 percent by private investors if they are even able to raise funds in the first place.
- **High fees and public safety concerns.** Having no access to basic and essential banking services is blunting the impact of social equity programs, including those with licensing criteria meant to empower communities hardest hit by the war on drugs. Moreover, these businesses are forced to operate on an all-cash basis, exposing them to security risks, including armed robberies that threaten staff safety and require additional operating costs.
- **Barriers for individuals with past convictions.** While many states offer equity licenses to those with previous cannabis-related convictions, many of the equity programs' preconditions are far too restrictive. Hopeful equity licensees often must prove current or former ownership of a profitable business, years of financial statements, and other preconditions that are difficult for those with an old criminal record to attain.

While the SAFE Banking Act is not the solution to all of these issues, we firmly believe that if paired with restorative justice measures that remove past convictions as a barrier, thousands of people trying to enter or survive in this industry would have a fighting chance to be successful.

We hope you agree that now is the opportunity to take action and close some of these glaring gaps facing existing and aspiring business owners. Our communities depend on it.

Sincerely,

CC: The Honorable Cory Booker, United States Senator

Shaun Astorga  
Happy Daze Boutique  
Rockaway, NJ

Mark Boulding  
Cheeba Spot LLC  
Newark, NJ

Darrin Chandler Jr  
Premium Genetics  
Ewing, NJ

Anthony Byron Cage  
The Higher Calling LLC  
Syracuse, NY

Jose Cruz  
Mid Atlantic Growth LLC  
Illinois, NJ

John Dockery  
Simply Pure  
Downtown Trenton, NJ

Chad Everwine  
Woodbury Cannabis Company  
Carneys Points, NJ

Cassara Grasso  
Happy Daze Boutique  
NJ

Charles Greelensky  
CannAbyss Dispensary  
Elizabeth, NJ

Derrick Green  
Green Consultants LLC  
Southampton, NJ

Patricia Gregory  
Canna Remedies  
Ewing, NJ

Michael Golden  
The Higher Calling LLC  
Syracuse, NY

Eugene Gorin  
Green Gem Industries, Inc  
NJ

Victor Guadagnino  
Canna Remedies  
Trenton, NJ

Steven Hankin  
Cannabis Plus LLC  
Fairfield, NJ

Alexis Henderson  
Island Vibez, LLC  
Plainfield, NJ

Beck Hickey  
Uptown Cannabis Coalition  
New York, NY

Liliana Hollandt  
Lady L Cannabis LLC  
Jersey City, NJ

Tahir Johnson  
Simply Pure Trenton NJ Inc  
Ewing, NJ

Lerone Jones  
Mister Jones LLC  
NJ

Justin Crogile  
Treetotics  
Newark, NJ

Jessica Marie Villars  
Baked by the River  
Lambertville, NJ

Donna Mastrantonio  
Tangerine Tree Dispensary  
Morris County, NJ

Coss Marte  
CONBUD  
New York, NY

Nathanael Mehle  
Ascension Cannabis Brands  
Millville, NJ

Howell Miller  
Two Buds Enterprise, Inc.  
Bronx, NY

Rasean Morrison  
Dr. Jae Farms, Inc  
Passaic, NJ

Victoria Nelson  
Lovely Leaf  
NJ

Joshua Perez  
Deo's Garden LLC  
Teaneck, NJ

Salvatore Piazza  
FullTilt Labs LLC  
Ewing, NJ

Michael Quezada  
M.E Cruz LLC  
NJ

Jeremy Rivera  
Kush Culture Industry  
Queens, NY

Karim Singleton  
Cooked Dispensary LLC  
Jersey City, NJ

Stacey St.louis  
Compact Comforts  
Bronx, NY

Linda Solana  
CannaVibes LLC  
North Arlington, NJ

Eric Spencer  
Mello Tymes LLC  
New York, NY

Britni Tantalo  
Flower City Dispensary Inc.  
NY

Jayson Tantalo  
Flower City Dispensary Inc.  
NY

Rashid Taylor  
Victorious Gardens LLC  
NJ

Lorraine Williams  
Arise Cannabis NJ LLC  
Vineland, NJ