

February 17th, 2021

Dear Honorable Member of the Commerce Committee:

We write to express the support of AFSCME Council 5 and the 43,000 workers we represent for HF 600 and the proposed legalization, taxation, and regulation of adult-use cannabis, as well as the expungement of criminal offenses relating to possession of cannabis. We want to thank Majority Leader Ryan Winkler for carrying this important legislation and thank Chair Zack Stephenson for hearing the bill in his committee.

We feel strongly that the time for legalizing the use of cannabis for adults has come. Legalization and regulation of adult-use cannabis would allow our state to bring some crucially needed regulation to the industry, making health scares like 2019's outbreak of lung disease linked to counterfeit THC vape capsules far less likely to occur. It would provide potentially tens of millions of dollars in revenue to the state annually, rather than losing that tax revenue to states that have already legalized cannabis like Colorado, or losing it altogether if products are sold on illicit markets. It would ensure that transactions between manufacturers, dispensaries, and consumers are safe, and that products that are sold can be vetted, licensed, and clear of any concern over laced or toxic elements. And, perhaps most importantly, it protects BIPOC communities that have historically been persecuted and harmed based on a frame around cannabis that we know to be racist and untrue. The movement for racial and economic justice demands that those who were prosecuted for possession of small amounts of cannabis be released from confinement, have their records expunged, and be given equal opportunity at participating in this growing industry. The need for this bill is apparent and AFSCME Council 5 supports its passage.

HF 600 contains a robust licensing system that regulates every facet of the cannabis industry in Minnesota. It establishes a Cannabis Management Board with representatives from agriculture, corporate management, public health, industry regulation, statute compliance, economic development opportunities, and social equity promotion. This bill establishes an advisory council to monitor the industry and review what works for Minnesotans and what needs change. It includes significant tracking mechanisms to ensure that fraud and theft is prevented. And it includes inspection language that will promote integrity within the industry. This legislation is ready for prime time.

We also urge that the committee pass this bill because the desire to legalize cannabis played a clear role in the outcome of several legislative races in the 2020 general election. In February of 2020, the Star Tribune and MPR News released a survey showing that a majority of Minnesotans support the legalization, regulation, and taxation of adult-use cannabis.

AFSCME Council 5 is a union of more than 43,000 working Minnesotans from across the state. We advocate for excellence in services for the public, dignity in the workplace, and opportunity and prosperity for all workers.



AFSCME Council 5
300 Hardman Ave. S.
South St. Paul, MN 55075
www.afscmemn.org

We need to pass House File 600 so we can build a safer, more equitable state for all, end the failed prohibition of adult-use cannabis, and secure opportunity and prosperity for all.

We urge you to pass HF 600 out of committee and vote for its passage on the House floor.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Bleyhl".

Julie Bleyhl, Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ethan Vogel".

Ethan Vogel, Legislative Director

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