

May 21, 2026

Representative Joseph J. Solomon, Jr, Chair
House Committee on Corporations
houseCorporations@rilegislature.gov

Dear Chair Solomon,

On behalf of Co-op Rhody, we write in support of H8544, legislation intended to restore momentum to Rhode Island's cannabis retail licensing process. As an organization that works closely with several worker cooperative applicants, and has long supported the development of an equitable cannabis industry in Rhode Island, we believe this bill represents a pragmatic step toward resolving ongoing legal barriers that have stalled implementation and harmed industry applicants, cultivators, workers, and consumers.

For years, prospective cannabis retailers have invested substantial time, resources, and hope into a licensing process that has remained frozen amid litigation and procedural uncertainty. For as long as the license process stalls, many applicants continue to hemorrhage ongoing costs, particularly related to real estate. Of course, this financial strain disproportionately threatens the viability of undercapitalized social equity and local cooperative license applicants. At the same time, cultivators face limited retail access and constrained market opportunities, consumers have fewer choices and less geographic access to licensed dispensaries, and a few incumbent dispensaries earn nation-leading profits. H8544 offers regulators a path forward by addressing the core aspects of the Act facing legal challenge, allowing the Cannabis Control Commission to mitigate the financial harm to applicants, cultivators, and consumers by proceeding with social equity certification and licensing as quickly as possible.

Delays not only undermine confidence in the regulatory system, but also disproportionately disadvantage smaller and community-based applicants who lack the financial resources to endure prolonged uncertainty. Advancing this bill would help restore trust in the state's commitment to implementing a fair and workable cannabis marketplace.

With these points being made, we acknowledge that the removal of four out of five social equity qualifying criteria may adversely affect social equity applicants. If these revisions are deemed absolutely necessary to address legal challenges, we suggest that the legislation include language committing the Commission to open grant applications for Social Equity Fund grants on a specific timeline, perhaps in the same 60 day period in which social equity certification and retail licensing will reopen, in order to preserve momentum and feasibility for social equity applicants who have thus far been shut out of benefitting in this marketplace.

We also encourage the General Assembly to clarify the language surrounding the reopening of the retail license application window and the duration of that window. Rather than the

requirement that the Commission somewhat ambiguously “institute a new retail licensing application process” within 60 days of the bill’s passage, we suggest that they should “begin accepting applications for new retail licenses.” We also suggest explicitly capping the length of the application window to 30 days in the interest of expediency and transparency. Applicants, workers, and businesses across the supply chain need certainty that the process will move forward without unnecessary delay.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued work to ensure Rhode Island’s cannabis industry develops in a fair, equitable, and economically sustainable manner.

Sincerely,
Co-op Rhody