

Rhode Island Growers Association
536 Atwells Ave.
Providence RI 02909

May 27th, 2026

The Honorable Joseph Solomon Jr.
Chairman, House Corporations Committee
Rhode Island House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 8544 – An Act Relating to Food and Drugs – The Rhode Island Cannabis Act

Dear Chair Solomon and members of the committee,

The Rhode Island Growers Association strongly supports House Bill 8544 and urges the General Assembly to pass it as soon as possible.

Rhode Island legalized adult-use cannabis in 2022 and authorized twenty-four additional retail dispensary licenses. That decision recognized that a legal cannabis market cannot function properly without enough licensed retail stores to serve consumers, support local businesses, generate tax revenue, and move regulated products through the legal supply chain. Nearly four years later, those licenses still have not been issued. For Rhode Island cultivators, that delay has created a serious and growing problem.

The State has licensed cultivators to produce safe, tested, regulated cannabis, but there are still too few retail outlets through which that product can reach consumers. This creates a bottleneck in the legal market. Cultivators can grow, process, test, package, and transfer compliant cannabis products, but without enough licensed retailers, there is not enough legal shelf space for those products to be sold. That harms cultivators, prospective retailers, consumers, municipalities, and the overall stability of Rhode Island's cannabis program.

Rhode Island cultivators have made significant investments based on the market structure the State created. We have built facilities, hired employees, purchased equipment, installed security systems, implemented seed-to-sale tracking, paid licensing fees, and complied with extensive regulatory requirements. These businesses also support contractors, electricians, HVAC companies, security vendors, packaging suppliers, testing laboratories, transportation providers, accountants, attorneys, and other local service providers.

When retail expansion is delayed, the impact reaches the entire supply chain. Cultivators cannot accurately forecast demand. Businesses cannot confidently invest in improvements, new

products, or additional employees. Wholesale pricing becomes less sustainable because supply is being pushed through too few retail channels. Municipalities lose potential revenue. Consumers continue to have limited access to the regulated market. The illicit market remains stronger than it should be because legal access is still too limited.

Expanding retail access is also a public safety issue. Products sold through Rhode Island's regulated cannabis system are tested, tracked, labeled, packaged, and sold only through licensed businesses subject to state oversight. Licensed retailers verify age, follow security requirements, maintain records, and operate under a regulated framework. Unregulated cannabis does not provide those same protections. If Rhode Island wants consumers to purchase through the legal market, the legal market must be accessible and practical throughout the state.

For cultivators, the addition of twenty-four retail stores represented long-awaited progress toward a more balanced and sustainable market. For years, Rhode Island has had more than fifty licensed cultivators competing to sell through only seven retail stores. That imbalance has constrained the legal market, limited growth across the industry, and made it harder for cultivators to plan production, invest in employees, and build stable businesses.

This is also an economic issue for Rhode Island. Massachusetts generates roughly double the cannabis retail spending per capita that Rhode Island does. That does not mean Rhode Islanders consume cannabis at half the rate of Massachusetts consumers. It means too many Rhode Island consumers continue to shop across state lines or outside the regulated market. Greater retail access would bring more consumers into Rhode Island's legal system, resulting in more legal sales, more tax revenue, and more stable demand for Rhode Island cultivators.

That conclusion is supported by the Whitney Economics report, an independent assessment of Rhode Island's cannabis market. The report found that Rhode Island needs at least twenty-four additional retail stores to begin realizing the full potential of the regulated cannabis market. The current licensing delay prevents Rhode Island from moving toward that more stable, competitive, and productive market structure.

H8544 is necessary because the recent federal court decision made clear that the current law has serious legal vulnerabilities that must be fixed before the licensing process can move forward. The Court enjoined several provisions of the Cannabis Act, including the definition of "applicant," the definition of "disproportionately impacted area," the definition of "social equity applicant," and the applicant residency requirement. In practical terms, the Court found that the current structure likely creates unconstitutional barriers for out-of-state applicants and raises equal protection problems in the way social equity eligibility is defined.

One of the issues identified by the Court is that the current law does not always tie social equity status to actual harm from cannabis prohibition. The law allows a person to qualify based on residence in a disproportionately impacted area, but several of the criteria used to define those

areas are based on general economic conditions, such as poverty rates, school lunch participation, SNAP participation, and unemployment. The Court questioned whether that is rationally connected to the goal of helping people and communities harmed by cannabis enforcement. In other words, someone who personally suffered no harm from cannabis criminalization could qualify because they live in a certain area.

These are not minor issues that can be fixed through regulation alone. There are legal problems that have stopped the licensing process. H8544 is necessary because Rhode Island needs a lawful, workable, and defensible process that allows the Cannabis Control Commission to issue the twenty-four retail licenses that were already authorized. Without legislative action, the State risks continued litigation, continued uncertainty, and continued harm to the regulated cannabis market.

If amendments are being considered, we respectfully urge the General Assembly to include more concrete timelines for the licensing process. The industry needs certainty. Applicants need to know when the process will restart, when applications will be reviewed, when selections will be made, and when licensees can move toward final approval and opening. Cultivators need to be able to plan production and business operations around a realistic market structure. A licensing process without clear deadlines risks more delay, more uncertainty, and more harm to businesses that have already invested in Rhode Island's legal cannabis market.

We also respectfully urge the General Assembly to include assurances that all twenty-four authorized retail licenses will be available in the first round of applications. Rhode Island does not need a partial solution. Releasing fewer than twenty-four licenses, or holding some back without a clear reason, would continue the same imbalance that exists today and undermine the purpose of moving this legislation forward.

The growers we represent are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for a functioning legal market. Licensed cultivators have followed the rules, invested in Rhode Island, created jobs, paid taxes and fees, and produced safe, tested cannabis for the regulated market. But the market cannot function properly if there are not enough retail stores to connect Rhode Island-grown products with Rhode Island consumers.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Growers Association strongly supports H8544 and urges the General Assembly to pass it as soon as possible. If the bill is amended, we ask that it be strengthened with clear timelines and a firm commitment that all twenty-four retail licenses will be made available in the first round of applications.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

RI Growers Association:

Aquidneck Harvest Company
Evergreen Gardens
CannCure
Firebrand
CannaPharm
Green Med Pros
CMS Gardens

Hanks Herbs
Cultivating RI
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