
Commerce & Gaming Committee

HB 1443

Brief Description: Concerning social equity within the cannabis industry.

Sponsors: Representatives Morgan, Wicks, Simmons, Berry, Johnson, J., Ramel, Kloba, Ryu, Peterson, Ormsby, Ortiz-Self, Harris-Talley and Macri.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Expands the purpose of the Task Force on Social Equity in Cannabis (Task Force) to include providing recommendations to the Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB) on the issuance of existing cannabis producer and processor licenses.
- Modifies Task Force reporting requirements, including adding recommendation topics and extending the final report due date to January 10, 2022.
- Expands the eligible applicants under the Social Equity Technical Assistance Grant Program to include all existing cannabis license holders and cannabis license applicants who meet social equity criteria.
- Requires the Department of Commerce to create a pilot program by August 2, 2021, to provide technical assistance to current cannabis retailer licensees who meet the social equity applicant criteria.

Hearing Date: 2/5/21

Staff: Kyle Raymond (786-7190).

Background:

Marijuana Social Equity Program.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Marijuana Social Equity Program (Program) was established in 2020 under the Liquor and Cannabis Board (LCB). Under the Program, marijuana retailer licenses that have been subject to forfeiture, revocation, or cancellation by the LCB may be issued or reissued to a social equity applicant who meets the requirements for the marijuana retailer license. In addition, marijuana retailer licenses that were not previously issued by the LCB, but could have been issued without exceeding the statewide limit established before January 1, 2020, may be issued under the Program. The Program expires July 1, 2028.

To be considered for a retail license, an applicant must submit a Social Equity Plan (Plan) with other application materials. The Plan includes information regarding the applicant's qualifications as a social equity applicant, how the applicant will advance social equity goals, and other specified business information. The LCB may add additional Plan components or requirements following consultation with marijuana social equity stakeholders, including the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs (Commission on African American Affairs).

In determining the issuance of a license among eligible applicants, the LCB may give priority to a social equity applicant based on the extent to which the application addresses the components of the Plan. The LCB may deny applications that do not meet the social equity goals or Plan requirements, or applicants that do not otherwise meet licensing requirements.

Key Program Definitions and Terms. Under the Program, certain terms and definitions are specified relating to determining Program eligibility and prioritizing applications for the LCB.

A "social equity applicant" is an applicant with majority ownership and control by at least one individual who: (1) has resided in a disproportionately impacted area for at least five of the preceding 10 years; or (2) has been convicted of a misdemeanor marijuana offense or is a family member of such an individual.

A "disproportionately impacted area" is a census tract or comparable geographic area with a high rate of: (1) poverty and unemployment; (2) participation in income-based or state programs; and (3) arrest, conviction, or incarceration related to the sale, possession, use, cultivation, manufacture or transport of cannabis.

The LCB may further define criteria for what is considered a "disproportionately impacted area" after consultation with the Commission on African American Affairs and other stakeholders.

The "social equity goals" under the Program include: (1) increasing the number of marijuana retailer licenses held by social equity applicants from disproportionately impacted areas; and (2) reducing accumulated harm suffered by individuals, families, and local communities subject to the severe impacts from marijuana prohibition enforcement.

Technical Assistance Competitive Grant Program.

The Marijuana Social Equity Technical Assistance Competitive Grant Program (Technical

Assistance Grant Program) was established in 2020 under the Department of Commerce (Department). The Competitive Grant Program requires the Department to award grants on a competitive basis to marijuana retail license applicants who are social equity applicants submitting a Plan under the Program. The Department must award grants primarily based on the strength of the Plan submitted by applicants, but they may also consider additional criteria as deemed necessary or appropriate. Eligible technical assistance activities under the Competitive Grant Program include:

- assistance navigating the marijuana retailer licensure process;
- marijuana business-specific education and business plan development;
- regulatory compliance training;
- financial management training and assistance in seeking financing; and
- connecting social equity applicants with established industry members, tribal marijuana enterprises, programs for mentoring, and other forms of support approved by the LCB.

The Competitive Grant Program is funded with a \$1.1 million annual appropriation from the Dedicated Marijuana Account.

Social Equity Task Force.

The Marijuana Social Equity Task Force (Task Force) was established in 2020. The purpose of the Task Force is to make recommendations to the LCB on, among other topics, establishing a program for the issuance and reissuance of existing marijuana retail licenses. The Task Force must also advise the Governor and the Legislature on policies that will facilitate the development of Program. The Task Force expires June 30, 2022.

The Task Force members are jointly appointed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, which include:

- a member from the Commission on African American Affairs, Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs;
- a member from an organization representing the African American community and from an organization representing the Latinx community;
- a labor organization involved in the marijuana industry;
- a member from the LCB, the Department, and the Office of the Attorney General;
- a member of the Association of Washington Cities;
- two members that hold a marijuana retail license; and
- two members that hold a producer or processor license, or both.

The Task Force must submit a report, or multiple reports, on recommended policies that will facilitate the development of the Program in Washington. The recommendations from the Task Force must include:

- factors the LCB must consider in distributing available marijuana retailer licenses that have been subject to forfeiture, revocation, or cancellation by the LCB, or marijuana retailer licenses that were not previously issued by the LCB but could have been issued without exceeding the limit on the statewide number of marijuana retailer licenses; and
- whether any additional marijuana licenses should be issued beyond the existing total

amount of marijuana licenses.

The Task Force is encouraged to submit individual recommendations as soon as possible to facilitate the LCB's early work to implement the recommendations. The final recommendations must be submitted to the Governor, the LCB, and the Legislature by December 1, 2020.

The LCB may adopt rules to implement the recommendations of the Task Force. However, a Task Force recommendation to increase the number of retail outlets above the statewide limit must be approved by the Legislature.

Staff support for the Task Force must be provided by the Health Equity Council of the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities, until the Office of Equity requests to take over Task Force staffing responsibility.

Summary of Bill:

Competitive Grant Program Modifications.

The eligible applicants under the Cannabis Social Equity Technical Assistance Competitive Grant Program (Technical Assistance Grant Program) include all existing cannabis license holders who meet social equity applicant criteria. In addition, cannabis license applicants who meet social equity applicant criteria are eligible applicants under the Technical Assistance Grant Program.

The Department of Commerce (Commerce) must create a pilot program by August 2, 2021, to provide technical assistance to current cannabis retailer licensees who meet the social equity applicant criteria. The Department must allocate a minimum of \$150,000 for the pilot program to provide technical assistance for infrastructure projects, technology upgrades, incubator and mentorship programs, and supplies. The recipients of grants must demonstrate that the project has been completed within 12 months of receiving a grant.

Social Equity Program Modifications.

The Social Equity Program expiration date is July 1, 2029.

Key Program Definitions and Term Modifications. A conviction of a drug offense conviction of an applicant, or family member of an applicant, is added as a qualifying factor to be considered a social equity applicant. An individual must have lived in a disproportionately impacted area for five years during 1975 through 2015 to be considered a social equity applicant.

An applicant who meets criteria defined in rule by the LCB is considered a social equity applicant. The rules defining additional criteria for being considered a social equity applicant must be done after consultation with the Commission on African American Affairs and other commissions, agencies, and advocates, as determined by the LCB.

The entities the LCB must consult while further defining criteria for what is considered a

"disproportionately impacted area" include commissions and advocates.

Social Equity Task Force Modifications.

The purpose of the Task Force on Social Equity in Cannabis (Task Force) also includes providing recommendations to the LCB on the issuance of existing cannabis processor and producer licenses.

The Task Force members also include two processor and two producer licensee holders.

The Task Force must also provide recommendations on the following topics:

- the social equity impact of altering residential cannabis agriculture regulations;
- the social equity impact of shifting primary regulation of cannabis production from the board to the Department of Agriculture, including potential impacts to the employment rights of workers;
- the social equity impact of removing nonviolent cannabis related felonies and misdemeanors from obtaining a cannabis license;
- whether to create workforce training opportunities for underserved communities to increase employment opportunities in the cannabis industry;
- the social equity impact of reducing or ending the funding directed to the Washington State Patrol Drug Enforcement Task Force and redirecting an equivalent amount to a Cannabis Social Equity Program; and
- the social equity impact of creating new cannabis license types.

The due date of the final Task Force recommendations is January 10, 2022.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.