



DATE: February 26, 2021
TO: Judiciary Committee
FROM: Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance
RE: S.B. 888 An Act Responsibly and Equitably Regulating Adult-Use Cannabis

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Ben Shaiken, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association of community nonprofits. Community nonprofits provide essential services in every city and town in Connecticut, serving more than half a million people in need and employing 117,000 people across the State. They are an important part of what makes Connecticut a great place to live and work and an important piece of our economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding **S.B. 888 An Act Responsibly and Equitably Regulating Adult-Use Cannabis**.

The Alliance does not have a position on whether or not cannabis should be made legal for recreational use by adults. Community nonprofits serve on the front lines of Connecticut's substance abuse and mental health treatment service-delivery systems, working to help people who are struggling with addiction to substances, including marijuana, and destructive behaviors enter long-term recovery. Community nonprofits also serve people impacted by the criminal justice system, and the possession and sale of marijuana being a crime has had significant negative impacts on communities of color and low-income people for more than half a century, communities that nonprofits disproportionately serve.

Given those considerations, it is therefore clear that the tax revenue that legal recreational cannabis sales would generate for the State must be reinvested in the addiction and mental health treatment system. Illinois and Oregon have both set aside 20% of tax revenue from legal recreational cannabis. S.B. 888 makes no such investment, and as such it is unacceptable as currently drafted.

Behavioral health funding has been the target of repeated budget cuts, holdbacks and rescissions in the State Budget. For example, in the adult behavioral health system, all Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' contracts were cut 5% in Fiscal Year 2017. Grant funding has been cut by more than 17% since Fiscal Year 2013; **funding directed specifically for substance abuse treatment has been cut by almost 30%**.

Meanwhile, demand for services has increased. In 2019, 95% of nonprofits said demand for their services had increased over the last five years, and 40% of nonprofits said demand had risen by more than 15%. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the inequities created by the State's chronic underfunding of community services.

We respectfully request that a significant percentage of the revenue the State will collect from cannabis legalization be set aside for mental health and substance abuse treatment services.

Thank you for your consideration of this important topic.