

Dear Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned, write to express our concern over the problem of armed robberies of state-legal cannabis (marijuana) stores, and to call for effective congressional measures to reduce the sector's dangerous over-reliance on cash. The first such measure needed is the SAFE Banking Act.

The cannabis store robbery problem varies in seriousness over time and place, but is capable of erupting with force. The worst occurrence to date is a surge that took place in Washington State between November 2021 and the following April. This 4 ½ month period saw nearly 100 documented robberies target approximately 80 cannabis stores, and ended with three people dead.¹ Washington Governor Jay Inslee and other state officials described the surge as "a very real public safety crisis," in a letter sent to Congressional leaders that May.²

A recent study found that cash derived from purchase transactions was the dominant target of robbers during the Washington surge. Specifically, cash alone was cited in reports for over 40% of the robberies during the Washington surge for which information on property targeted was available, indicating that cash was the motivation for the robbers a very substantial percentage of the time. Product-only theft through robbery, by contrast, was reported just once during the surge, or 2% of the robberies.³ For all robberies tracked in Washington from 2017 through mid-2022 (during the surge, before, and after), product-only robberies were reported a bit more frequently at 10% of the total, but were still small in number compared with the 37% reported as cash-only.⁴

The study also found that robberies targeting the back of a store – which in a great majority of the cases in Washington was done to obtain cash from a safe – were associated with higher average aggression levels than other robberies.⁵ For some cases, news reports demonstrated a causal link between the targeting of cash and assaults on workers.⁶

PTSD is believed to occur in 25% or more cases of criminal victimization.⁷ This suggests that even those robberies which did not involve physical assaults on workers, are likely to have created numerous victims suffering lasting psychological effects. Criminal victimization within a community also generates fear and anxiety on the part of the rest of the community – these robberies affected the lives of workers and owners of other cannabis stores as well.

Between the directly targeted personnel, their friends and loved ones, and their at-risk colleagues, the impacted population numbers in the thousands. Customers of these stores, who had sought a safer environment by taking their business to the state-legal system instead of the underground market, can also be considered an impacted population. The number of people affected in these ways will continue to grow with the passage of time, and as medical or adult use legal cannabis systems get established in more places, absent measures taken by Congress and others to protect them.

The primary stated purpose of the SAFE Banking Act is physical safety.⁸ However, the Act has also been accompanied by efforts to promote economic inclusion for persons working in the cannabis industry or who have past criminal justice involvement, and to address challenges cannabis businesses face when seeking financing. We strongly support the pursuit of these objectives through whatever the most strategically viable path is, whether as part of an amended SAFE Banking Act or through other vehicles.

The facts on the ground as noted above, as well as other facts and long-held criminological understandings about property crime, show that the abnormal banking situation faced by the state-legal

cannabis industry is a factor jeopardizing workers' lives and health. SAFE Banking is not the first effort to address the cannabis sector's dangerous overreliance on cash, and it may not be the last that is needed. But the safety issues faced by the cannabis sector won't be solved without it.

In light of the demonstrated humanitarian toll that is possible if an event as occurred in Washington were to recur, it is a moral imperative for Congress to enact some version of the SAFE Banking Act this year, in order to progress our country toward a safe environment for the workers, owners, customers and other visitors of state-legal cannabis retail stores.

Sincerely,

A New PATH (Parents for Addiction Treatment & Healing)
Alabama Cannabis Industry Association
Alliance for Sensible Markets
Arkansas Cannabis Business Association
Better Organizing to Win Legalization
Brazilian Association of Cannabis Industries
California NORML
Cannabis Industry Alliance of Oregon (CIAO)
Center for Living and Learning
Chamber of Cannabis
Coalition for Medical Marijuana--New Jersey, Inc.
DCMJ.org
Drug Policy Forum of Hawai'i
Housing Works
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Maine Cannabis Industry Association
Maryland NORML
Michigan Cannabis Industry Association
Michigan NORML
Minority Cannabis Business Association
Missouri Cannabis Trade Association
National Cannabis Industry Association
National Cannabis Roundtable
National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws
New Mexico Cannabis Chamber of Commerce
Patients Out of Time
Public Justice Center
San Diego/Imperial Counties Joint Labor Management Cannabis Committee
Society of Cannabis Clinicians
StoptheDrugWar.org
The Cannabis Alliance
The Cannabis Business Association of Illinois
United Food and Commercial Workers International Union
Utah Cannabis Association
Veterans for Medical Cannabis Access
Women Who Never Give Up

This letter is addressed to all US Senators and Representatives, but prioritizing distribution to members of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs who are also sponsors of the SAFE Banking Act. Distribution to other offices will be done as resources and timing permits.

This letter is coordinated by StoptheDrugWar.org. For further information contact David Borden, Executive Director of StoptheDrugWar.org (Washington, DC) at (202) 236-8620 or borden@drcnet.org (DC); or Caitlein Ryan, Executive Director of The Cannabis Alliance (WA), (425) 314-9004 or caitlein.ryan@thecannabisalliance.us.

¹ Borden, D. (2022) *Dangerous Delays: What Washington (Re)Teaches Us About Cash and Cannabis Store Robberies* (hereinafter *Dangerous Delays*). StoptheDrugWar.org, Washington, DC. Available at:

<https://stopthedrugwar.org/delays> (Accessed: April 5, 2023). The three people killed include cannabis worker Jordan Brown; and two robbery suspects, one killed by a store guard, the other in a shootout with police.

² Inslee, J. et al. (2022) *SAFE Banking Act Letter*, Washington State Department of Financial Institutions. State of Washington. Available at: <https://dfi.wa.gov/sites/default/files/safe-banking-act-letter-05-02-2022.pdf> (Accessed: December 6, 2022).

³ *Dangerous Delays*, page 23.

⁴ *Dangerous Delays*, page 21.

⁵ *Dangerous Delays*, page 25.

⁶ *Dangerous Delays*, page 5. See the three examples described at the beginning of the "Escalation to Tragedy" section.

⁷ *March 2010 National Victim Assistance Academy Participant Text*. Summarizing Resnick, H.S., D.G. Kilpatrick, B.S. Dansky, B.E. Saunders, and C.L. Best. 1993. "Prevalence of Civilian Trauma and PTSD in a Representative National Sample of Women." *Journal of Clinical and Consulting Psychology* 61(6). "Research suggests 25.8% of crime victims suffer PTSD during their lives (compared with 9.4% of victims of other traumas), and that lifetime prevalence could go as high as 45.2% for those who believed they could have been killed or seriously injured."

⁸ Rep. Perlmutter, E. (2021) H.R. 1996 - Safe Banking Act of 2021, Congressman Ed Perlmutter. U.S. House of Representatives. "The purpose of this Act is to increase public safety by ensuring access to financial services to cannabis-related legitimate businesses and service providers and reducing the amount of cash at such businesses."