

Alejandro Rangel-Lopez
Campaign Manager for New Frontiers
Written Opponent Testimony of SB 555
For the Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee

March 28th, 2024

Chair Thompson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on SB 555. My name is Alejandro Rangel-Lopez from Dodge City, and I am writing to you today as the Campaign Manager of New Frontiers. We're a southwest Kansas based project of the nonpartisan, nonprofit organization Loud Light Civic Action. New Frontiers' mission is to empower young southwest Kansans through the values of dignity, belonging, and freedom. I'm representing over 500 Kansans who have signed on to this project. As one of the nearly 70% of Kansans who support establishing legal access to cannabis in our great state, I stand in opposition to SB 555 because it is an example of exactly what we should NOT do when establishing a pilot program for medical cannabis that is equitable, accessible, and most of all, effective in providing safe and legal access to this plant in the state of Kansas.

As a lifelong resident of southwest Kansas, I know firsthand how difficult it can be to find a doctor and adequate medical care in the most rural regions of the state. While I am lucky to live in one of the largest cities in my part of the state with more reliable access to care, loved ones and others who live in southwest Kansas still often have to travel a minimum of an hour to Garden City for a specialist or two-and-a-half for one in Wichita. As it is currently written, SB 555 does not provide equitable access to medical cannabis for folk in every region of the state meaning it is very likely that even if you are able to get a medical card, someone from a rural area like me would have to drive hours just to get to a place where you can purchase it legally. If passed as it is written now, it's almost a certainty that the limited number of licenses for selling and producing cannabis would be given to businesses in the Kansas City and Wichita metropolitan areas. Aside from access issues, having such a limited medical program with no geographic distribution requirements makes it more likely for individuals to seek products from the illicit market which we know run the risk of being contaminated or laced as these substances aren't put up to the same regulating and monitoring standards that well-established cannabis programs in other states are. This is an even greater concern due to the fact that the most popular and easily accessible forms of consumption, smoking and vaping, would still be prohibited.

Second, it is very clear by the way that this bill is written that it seeks to benefit an already established business and effectively grant this corporation a monopoly on the medical cannabis market in Kansas. While I understand that a pilot program is limited in scope by its very nature, there are countless examples of ways to establish such a program in other states that meets folks' medical needs and builds futures for folks of all backgrounds, especially those who hail from communities most impacted by cannabis criminalization. The most effective way that I've seen other states do this is by including a tiered-licensing system where operations pay licensing fees dependent on size. Additionally, setting aside a certain number of these licenses for communities hit hardest by the "War on Drugs" in conjunction with the expungement of records of folks convicted of possession would help to alleviate some of the harms faced by Black and brown Kansans.

We are one of the few states in the nation without some sort of legal cannabis program. While this means we're behind the curve of some of our neighboring states like Colorado and Missouri, this also means we have the opportunity to avoid the mistakes of other programs and learn how to create an adequate program that truly benefits *all of us*. This is not that bill. I'm tired of seeing folks suffer needlessly due to inaction from our lawmakers, SB 555 is woefully inadequate in establishing a good program and flies in

the face of all the good policy that is already in place elsewhere. It's time for us to turn a new leaf and welcome new industry, opportunities, and futures for *all* Kansans. Our tax money should be staying here, not funding public expenditure across State Line Road.

I urge you to oppose SB 555 as it is currently written and get to work on a bill that actually serves the interests of Kansans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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