

**From:** [Chris Smith](#)  
**To:** [\\*CI-StPaul](#); [Contact-Council](#); [CouncilHearing \(CI-StPaul\)](#)  
**Subject:** Public Statement: Saint Paul Cannabis Public Hearing Sept. 11th  
**Date:** Thursday, September 12, 2024 8:58:28 AM

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Council President Jalali and Council Members,

I've been a resident of Lowertown for ten years now. I've served on the Capitol River Council, was appointed to the HREEO Commission, am a volunteer for Friends of Mears Park, and recently appointed by Governor Walz to the African American Health State Advisory Council. I am also the Community Engagement Organizer for the Association for Nonsmokers.

In my advocacy role, I was frequently at the Capitol before the passage of the recreational cannabis bill, and heard testimony about how legalization would address mass incarceration, especially among Black men. I grew up in the 80's and remembered how the "War on Drugs" targeted the Black community and how possession of cannabis could result in a long prison sentence, so I agree with the true intent for its legalization.

However, what I didn't hear at the Capitol was an outcry from community leaders asking for cannabis shops in their neighborhoods. In fact, during this election season we hear more of an outcry regarding the cost of groceries and the food deserts communities of color are still dealing with.

It seems, now that cannabis has been legalized, the focus has shifted from addressing inequities in the criminal justice system to maximizing profits and starting up new shops. Moreover, the state is spending tens of millions of dollars to prop up the industry, hoping to raise hundreds of millions in tax revenue, and giving little power to the local government to regulate it.

As a long-time St. Paul resident, I would like to see city leadership prioritize health equity over profits, especially in communities of color. As a commercial tobacco prevention advocate, it's easy for me to see that the cannabis industry is using the same tactic used by big tobacco, they're targeting kids. Having fewer cannabis shops and keeping them away from schools and parks leads to fewer opportunities for kids to start using.

I am asking the Council to use the maximum store distance requirement that state law would allow.

Thank You

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