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Supporting Quality Union Jobs in a Legalized Recreational Cannabis Program

Submitted by Delegate Steven M. Powell, UFCW Local 881

WHEREAS, on June 25th, 2019, Governor Pritzker signed into law the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act, Illinois became the 13th state to allow for adult use cannabis consumption with a significant focus on expungement for minor drug offenses, investment in communities disproportionately impacted by the failed war on drugs and equity in ownership for forthcoming license holders in Illinois; and

WHEREAS, a legalized cannabis industry in Illinois will help resolve the disparities in criminal prosecution of non-violent drug offenders, bring needed revenue to local and state governments of anywhere between \$350 million and \$700 million annually, help entrepreneurs start new businesses, employ potentially thousands looking to work in this new industry, revitalize both rural and urban economies, reign in the black market fueled drug trade, and help further mitigate the burgeoning opioid abuse epidemic; and

WHEREAS, on January 1st, 2020 adult use cannabis became legal in Illinois, our state began to expand potential ownership and employment opportunities in jobs directly and indirectly related to the cannabis industry, that some projections have approaching 60,000 or more in the next five years, offering the opportunity to have good family supporting jobs created across our state and in all of our communities; and

WHEREAS, the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act explicitly encourages labor organizing and union relationships between workers and companies and has labor neutrality consideration in its scoring of future licenses upwards of 2% of total points awarded on merit based applications, thanks to dogged advocacy from organized labor, which has so far incentivized thousands of cannabis applications to enter into Labor Peace Agreements with Illinois unions and will make the likelihood of living wages, healthcare, retirement security, secure schedules, and educational opportunities all the more likely in the forthcoming industry; and

WHEREAS, there have already been successful organizing drives and elections within the Illinois cannabis industry that has given hundreds of existing cannabis workers a voice on the job and the benefit of holding a union card, it has also shown that some cannabis companies will use outdated and discriminatory labor laws to fight their workers from expressing their right to collectively bargain; and

WHEREAS, under the National Labor Relations Act agricultural workers are barred from unionizing, a racist legacy from the 1930's that was used to deny Black and Latino farm workers in the South and West from building worker power and organizing unions; and

WHEREAS, national cannabis companies have used this agricultural exemption for labor laws to successfully fight cannabis cultivation and garden workers the ability to join their co-workers in standing for an election and bargain to better their working conditions, denying them the ability to raise the standards, pay, and benefits for a very technical and skilled job that is essential to the industry's ability to function and expand; and

WHEREAS, states like Oregon, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, California, and New York have state level agricultural worker protections that allow them to unionize and extend that right to cannabis workers, raising the standards for their cannabis and agricultural industries; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Illinois AFL-CIO strongly supports efforts to ensure all cannabis industry jobs are afforded full labor rights to organize, vote on, and join a union of their choosing to create jobs in the adult use cannabis industry that are dignified and respected among today's labor workforce through collective bargaining; and be it further

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RESOLVED, that the Illinois AFL-CIO strongly supports expanding the “labor neutrality” clause in any bill that the General Assembly considers in revising and expanding the recreational cannabis industry, so that workers will have an unobstructed path to unionizing their workplaces if a majority votes to do so; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that the Illinois AFL-CIO will transmit a copy of this resolution to the Central Labor Councils and its affiliates throughout the State of Illinois to support and encourage efforts to reach out and empower employees of the medical and recreational cannabis industries through collective bargaining and an expansion of union rights for workers in every sector of the cannabis industry.