

April 18, 2021

Dear Chairman Gjerde and Members of the Board,

I was born and raised in this community, only moving away for a short time to attend college in Berkeley. As soon as I left, I realized that the one thing that I missed the most was the people and the sense of community. I was born in the era when Mendocino County was centralized around the booming logging industry. I witnessed Mendocino County in its glory days when Branscomb was an actual town with its own ball fields. When my small hometown of Laytonville had enough participants to support their own sports leagues year after year without having to scour for every last able-bodied child to field its teams. When our schools were filled with enough students to support the small class sizes and unique opportunities that allowed our youth to flourish. When a young kid, such as myself at the time, was able to begin her life as an entrepreneur by selling fruits and berries from my family's organic farm at the county's local farmer's markets. People were happy. Violent crime levels were low. There was something unique that Mendocino County had that drew me back to it. To me, home wasn't an actual house, but it was this community, it was Mendocino County. And now, here I am. I have chosen this place as my home, as my life, and as the place that I want to raise my daughter.

As we look around today, the picture I have painted of Mendocino County as a child isn't what we see now. Our crime rates are climbing, and our school enrollments are declining. Of course, in the times I speak of, illegal cannabis money was helping to support these communities and really give them the extra push that they needed economically. But what we failed to realize during these times was that it was the local logging industry that was really holding everything together. The logging industry provided jobs. It was our middle class. It was a way for our community members who didn't want to participate in cannabis (or weren't able to,) to make a living that was stable and lucrative enough to support their families and allow them to live good lives. Once our local timber industry crashed, we saw the effects it had on our population and felt the ripples down the chain. Our schools began to suffer. Our ability to fund our police departments diminished. Our local hospitals began to close certain departments because they could no longer support them. We no longer had enough middle-class jobs in the county to support our population. It was a snowball effect that just got worse, affecting each aspect of our communities. The black market saved a lot of individuals and our local economy was able to maintain as we saw new higher-end businesses coming into town, being supported by a select few. But what we didn't have any more was a working middle class or the population base to support our critical infrastructure.

I hear lots of arguments for and against Phase 3 cannabis expansion, but what I don't think we hear enough is what is best for the people of this county. I believe that under the current proposal set forth before you, we will see the biggest improvement to our local communities than we have seen in decades. Competitive cannabis expansion will give way to the return of the middle class. We will have the ability to provide jobs for people who otherwise may be working for minimum wage, struggling to survive and support their families. People will no longer have to make the tough decisions to continue living minimally or relocating elsewhere to raise their families. People will have the ability to make decent wages as trimmers, farm laborers, lab technicians, agricultural specialists. They will be able to make a good living, to receive benefits and to establish Mendocino County as their homes forever. Cannabis has the ability to do what the timber industry did for our communities by way of return of the middle class and thus stabilizing our population base.

I hear people say that cannabis is a part our heritage and the commercialization of it within Mendocino County would thus ruin what we were built on. But I disagree. Large-scale cannabis expansion would return us to our heritage. Our heritage isn't just about our small cannabis operations. Our heritage is our people. Our heritage is our sense of community. It's our children playing little league games in our parks. It's our schools having enough students to receive the funding necessary to support the special programs that once made them unique and distinguished from those in neighboring counties. It's feeling safe because our crime rates are low as we have the means for people to make a good living without having to revert to crime. It's knowing that when you're in need of help your local departments can respond quickly because we have the ability to fund the forces and keep our hospitals, clinics, and local specialists afloat. Our heritage is dependent on the middle class and without large-scale cannabis expansion we don't have the job opportunities to support a middle class.

I ask of you today to just think about what is truly best for the people who reside in this county. Don't just think about the cannabis operators, large and small, but think about the future of our county. Think about the things that made us fall in love with this area. Think about what we could become again. Think about our true heritage.

Sincerely,

Malila Gordon