**Section 650.10 Purpose**

a) In the interest of establishing a legal cannabis industry that is equitable and accessible to those most adversely impacted by the enforcement of drug-related laws in Illinois, including cannabis-related laws, the General Assembly has found that a social equity program in the cannabis industry should be established to help remedy the harms resulting from the disproportionate enforcement of cannabis-related laws. The Cannabis Social Equity Program authorized by the Act should offer, among other things, financial assistance and License application benefits to individuals most directly and adversely impacted by the enforcement of cannabis-related laws who are interested in starting Cannabis Business Establishments.

b) In furtherance of this purpose, the Department is authorized to:

1) identify geographic areas that have been disproportionately impacted by the enforcement of cannabis-related laws (Disproportionately Impacted Areas);

2) provide financial assistance, loans, grants, and technical assistance to Social Equity Applicants;

3) conduct outreach that may be provided or targeted to attract and support Social Equity Applicants; and

4) assist with job training and technical assistance for Illinois residents in Disproportionately Impacted Areas.

c) The Cannabis Social Equity Program includes the Business Loan and Financial Assistance Program through which the Department will undertake the following activities:

1) Subject to the availability of funding, the Department will provide term loans and lines of credit on a low or no interest basis to eligible Illinois businesses that are seeking or have received licensure under the Act.

2) Applications will be accepted following an announcement on the Department's website. The Department will prioritize loans and lines of credit based on market entry dates, demand, the availability of funding, and the extent to which the financial support furthers the purposes of the Act.

3) The Department may issue conditional commitment letters to Social Equity Applicants to support applications for licensure.

4) The Department may enter into agreements with financial institutions and other sources of capital to leverage additional funding for Qualified Social Equity Applicants or to otherwise facilitate social equity in the cannabis industry.