

Statement on Marijuana Legalization for the 2021 NYS Legislative Session



The Western New York Chemical Dependency Consortium does not support the legalization of marijuana at the state or federal level. Legalization would likely make the work of treatment, prevention, and recovery providers in Western New York even more daunting than it already is. In fact, it has been a significant challenge for providers to adapt to the breadth of the opioid crisis over the last few years. Our programs are already significantly strained, and adding marijuana legalization would burden our services even further. Instead, New York State should pursue further decriminalization. The current proposals still create potential opportunities for people – especially people of color – to face incarceration or legal consequences if they were to purchase non-taxed products or if they purchased products while under the legal age, for example.

If legalization were to happen in New York, we request that it be done in a thoughtful and methodical manner that considers the potential long-term impacts of the legislation on our communities. This includes the following priorities below:

Funding

- A significant portion of the tax revenue generated from the legalization of marijuana should be allocated to the Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS).
- Any tax revenue provided to OASAS from marijuana legalization must be supplemental to current state funding provided for treatment, prevention, and recovery services. Funding should not merely shift from one source to another.

Justice and Equity

- Communities of color throughout the state should also benefit from any generated tax revenue.
- There should be per capita limits on the number of dispensaries in each community to ensure that communities of color in particular don't bear the brunt of being oversaturated with dispensaries.
- Anyone arrested for infractions with marijuana should be mandated to attend treatment or prevention services through an assessment instead of facing potential incarceration.

Effects on Youth & Additional Recommendations

- Advertising for and the physical locations of dispensaries and any other components of marijuana legalization should not target youth and should not occur within close proximity to schools or youth organizations.
- Due to negative effects on structural and functional brain development, no one under the age of 25 should have access to marijuana.
- Marijuana packaging should contain product warnings regarding its risks similar to tobacco.
- Until manufacturers are better able to control THC levels in their products, marijuana edibles should not be legalized.

This list is not exhaustive of the potential concerns and challenges that could come with marijuana legalization, and the Western New York Chemical Dependency Consortium encourages lawmakers to develop policy that allows for reasonable considerations of the risks inherently involved in legalization of marijuana.