



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Senator Sanders' Pot Talk Draws Large Crowd - Community Debates Legalization of Marijuana in New York State

JAMES SANDERS JR. February 4, 2019



State Senator James Sanders, Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway) held a debate on the possible legalization of recreational marijuana in New York State and the impact it could have on communities in Queens.

"New York State seems to be rushing to a solution on this issue," Sanders said. "It's an issue that's filled our jails, filled our courts, filled our newspapers and filled everyone's daily conversation, but what do real people think about this? That's what we are going to find out

today.”

The event featured panelists representing different perspectives on the social, economic, legal, and political pros and cons of marijuana legalization.

The 200 community members who attended the event, which was held on February 2, 2019 at the Black Spectrum Theatre in Jamaica, also had an opportunity to voice their views and opinions on the subject.

On the pro-side – participants said legalization would cause less arrests and interaction with law enforcement; increase potential opportunities for community growth and economic investment, and put in place regulations that would decrease black market sales.

On the con side – arguments were made that the drug could damage people’s health and cause car accidents and other fatalities; taxes collected from legal weed would not be reinvested into local communities, that a few top companies would monopolize dispensaries, as is the case in New York currently with medical marijuana. Also if marijuana is commercialized that would increase the desire for people to want to smoke it, opponents said.

All of the panelists, however, as well as Senator Sanders agreed that marijuana should be decriminalized. Senator Sanders does not support the legalization of marijuana, because he said he is wary anytime the government becomes a “pusher” and has concerns about the “legalize it now, figure it out later” mentality.

Speaking in favor of legalization were: Anthony Posada, Supervising Attorney, Legal Aid Society; Kenny Carter, Founder and Executive Director of Fathers Alive in the Hood; Andrea

Colon, Community Engagement Organizer with the Rockaway Youth Task Force; Lamark Plaskett, Promotions Assistant and Board Operator with Entercom Communications; and Dasheeda Dawson aka The Weedhead and Founder of MJM Strategy.

Speaking against legalization were: Will Jones, Special Assistant to the President for the Communications and Outreach of the Smart Approaches to Marijuana, AU Hogan, President of the Baisley Park Houses Tenant Association; and Douglas Knight, Director of Alternative Sentencing Programs for the Queens DA's Office.

The debate's winner, as chosen by the audience, was a tie, with everyone agreeing that each side presented a compelling argument with many valid points. Senator Sanders plans to continue the conversation about marijuana legalization by hosting similar events around the district starting next month.

Senator Sanders encourages everyone to weigh in on the legalization of marijuana debate by posting to social media using the hashtag #NYTALKSPOT

We would like to thank the Black Spectrum Theatre for allowing us to use their space to host the event. We could also like to thank our partners Senator Leroy Comrie, Assembly Member Clyde Vanel, the Working Families Party, Drug Policy Alliance and Rockaway Youth Task Force.