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THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



JAMAAL T. BAILEY
SENATOR
36TH DISTRICT

DISTRICT OFFICE:

959 E. 233RD STREET
BRONX, NEW YORK 10466
TEL. (718) 547-8854
FAX (718) 515-2718

ALBANY OFFICE:

ROOM 707
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
TEL. (518) 455-2061
FAX (518) 426-6998

EMAIL:

BAILEY@NYSENATE.GOV

WEBSITE:

BAILEY.NYSENATE.GOV

NYSENATE.GOV

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CONTACT: Ashley Meza (718) 547-8854 | meza@nysenate.gov

Marijuana Legalization Impact Assessment Study

(BRONX, NY) In January 2018, Governor Cuomo announced that he will be directing the New York State Department of Health (DOH) to conduct a study on the possible impact of regulated marijuana in New York State. Released in July 2018, the *Assessment of the Potential Impact of Regulated Marijuana in New York State* study evaluates potential effects of legalized marijuana as they relate to health, criminal justice and public safety, the economy and education. Using data from states that have already implemented legal regulation of marijuana as well as data from the already-established medical marijuana program across New York State, DOH concludes that the positive effects of marijuana legalization across the state outweigh the potential negative effects.

The study concludes that allowing the government to oversee the production, testing, labeling, distribution and sale of marijuana will benefit public health, as the dangers associated with the unregulated market may be mitigated. Such oversight of the regulated marijuana program will allow for licensing, quality control, consumer protection and various, enforceable restrictions. Legal access to marijuana, the study asserts, may reduce opioid deaths and opioid prescriptions. Marijuana provides an alternative option for pain relief; with easier access to legal marijuana, opioid prescription and usage may decrease. Regulation of marijuana may also help address the usage of synthetic marijuana, also known as K2. There has been a spike in the number of incidences with synthetic marijuana in the confines of the 36th Senate District. The study asserts that the regulated marijuana program could work towards eliminating the synthetic cannabinoid market, referencing the Global Drug Survey – which indicated that “countries that decriminalize marijuana have lower prevalence rates of synthetic marijuana use.”

Furthermore, the study finds that New York State would have one of the largest regulated marijuana markets in the country, allowing for increased tax revenue and employment opportunities. Tax revenues could be used to assist public health, education, transportation, research, law enforcement, and workforce development initiatives associated with the program.

It has been evidenced that people of color are disproportionately arrested and prosecuted for marijuana possession, despite equal rates of usage among white people. Such incarceration negatively impacts the health of communities and individuals by “destabilizing families, hindering access to education and health care, lowering employment opportunities, increasing poverty, and limiting access to housing.” This study finds that legalization of marijuana would allow the police force to focus on other aspects of their work, rather than minor marijuana arrests. This, in turn, would allow for more focus on healthcare, education and workforce development in communities.

It is time for New York State to join the nine states and the District of Columbia in legalizing the recreational sale of marijuana, benefitting public health, social justice, and our economy.

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