

## **NYS Budget Forum Testimony 2/29/20 Cannabis Legalization & Social Equity**

I'm Natalie Papillion — and I'm here to make the case for legal marijuana in New York State. As a disclaimer, I'm not a cannabis industry lobbyist — I run a nonprofit that advocates for social equity in the cannabis industry.

Why did I take on a role that scandalized literally everybody I know?

I worked at Google before founding The Equity Organization. At work one day, a colleague casually mentioned that her father had just started a hedge fund for cannabis industry investments.

I didn't think much of it at the time. But as I started reading more and more about this new 'Green Rush', I began to get very angry.

See, I went to Yale to study African-American history. There I learned about the *\*overt\** racism and xenophobia that led to marijuana prohibition — and its most devastating consequence, mass incarceration.

There's something so viscerally unjust about the fact a handful of wealthy, well-connected, disproportionately white business people will make millions of dollars doing the *\*very same thing\** we've jailed generations of black and brown men for.

I believe — like many of New York's legislators — that we have a moral imperative to leverage the momentum behind legal marijuana to start righting the wrongs of the War on Drugs.

I also believe — and I know Senator Krueger agrees with me — the CRTA doesn't go far enough. And thank you — I know you and many other members of the Legislature are fighting to include more robust social equity measures in the state's legalization legislation.

I've spent the past year researching what's worked — and what hasn't — when it comes to social equity initiatives in other legal states. I'd love an opportunity to share our recommendations as to how New York can create the most diverse, equitable and sustainable legal cannabis industry in the country.

Thank you for your time.

Natalie Papillion  
Founder & CEO, The Equity Organization  
[natalie@equityorganization.org](mailto:natalie@equityorganization.org)  
404-840-0958