



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeremy Cooney

## Senator Cooney Announces Senate Hearing on New York's Adult-Use Cannabis Market

JEREMY COONEY September 7, 2023

| ISSUE: SENATOR JEREMY COONEY, ADULT-USE CANNABIS LEGALIZATION, MARIJUANA REGULATION AND TAXATION ACT (MRTA)



Senator Cooney Addresses Media with Cannabis Advocates

The hearing will be held in conjunction with the chairs of the following senate standing committees: Agriculture, Finance, Investigations & Government Operations.

**(ROCHESTER, NY)** - Today, Senator Jeremy Cooney (**D-Rochester**) announced the New York State Senate Subcommittee on Cannabis will hold its first-ever public hearing on the State's

rollout of adult-use cannabis and ongoing challenges with legal retail access. The hearing will be held on Tuesday, October 30 at 11am in Albany. This hearing will be fully open to the public.

Since the Legislature's passage of the historic MRTA in March of 2021, New York's implementation of its adult-use cannabis program has had to confront consistent setbacks—multiple lawsuits intended to prevent the State's commitment to social justice goals, damaging court-ordered injunctions, and agency staffing challenges have all delayed the timeline for legal sales and created adverse effects on cultivators, processors, and retailers.

The Finger Lakes Region has been particularly impacted following a court injunction that lasted through May of this year. Moreover, the recent court decision regarding the legality of conditional adult-use retail dispensary (“CAURD”) licenses threatens to further delay cannabis retail operations. There are no adult-use dispensaries open in the region more than two years after recreational legalization, only pop-up sales through a “cannabis grower’s showcase,” from a retailer based out of Western New York.

Potential testimony at the hearing will come from regulatory agencies, public authorities as well as cannabis cultivators, processors, retailers—both applicants and licensees. A formal witness list will be made public closer to the hearing date.

Senator Cooney was appointed Chair of the Subcommittee on Cannabis in the spring of 2023. He also serves as co-chair of the Marijuana Task Force as part of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus.

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*As state lawmakers, we can't just pass bills and hope they work out. Instead, through legislative oversight, we have the responsibility to work with our Governor and state agencies to ensure our collective goals are met. Two years after legalizing adult-use recreational cannabis, New Yorkers are frustrated and disappointed in the State's ability to launch a safe and legal marketplace," said **Senator Jeremy Cooney**, Chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Cannabis. "I am calling this hearing with my partners in the Senate because we believe New Yorkers deserve clarity on what has been done so far and how we can help the retail market going into the next legislative session. Whether you are a potential consumer or a licensee who has risked their financial future in this industry, you deserve on-the-record answers, and we will ensure a productive and fair hearing. I am grateful for the ongoing support of Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, who recognizes the need for oversight and guidance."*

"The forthcoming Senate Subcommittee on Cannabis hearing, conducted in collaboration with the Finance, Agriculture, and IGO Committees, is another step in our commitment to a responsible and equitable retail cannabis market in New York State," said **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins**. "I commend Senator Jeremy Cooney for his dedicated leadership of the subcommittee, exemplifying the Senate Majority's commitment to fostering well-informed conversations on this issue. I also extend my gratitude to Chairs Liz Krueger, Michelle Hinchey, and James Skoufis for their invaluable expertise and guidance. Together, we are working to help ensure that New York's retail cannabis market is firmly rooted in the principles of safety, justice, inclusivity, and economic prosperity."

"The historic passage of the MRTA set forth an inspiring vision for a cannabis industry rooted in local agriculture, equity, and inclusion," said **Senator Michelle Hinchey**, *Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee*. "Yet, the persistent uncertainty and delays surrounding the rollout of New York's cannabis market have triggered an agricultural emergency, leaving our State's farmers burdened with surplus stock from last year's harvest and severe financial

hardships. In response, I'm proud to join my colleagues in co-convening the first-ever hearing on New York's cannabis market, which will provide a transparent platform fostering active engagement with the regulatory agencies overseeing the next phases and a voice for the cultivators who have been adversely affected. I thank Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues, the chairs of the Senate Committees on Cannabis, Finance, Investigations & Government Operations, for their partnership. We are in pursuit of answers and a clear path forward, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to securing the successful and equitable implementation of New York's retail cannabis market."

"Following years of research and consultation with stakeholders, MRTA was enacted to end the failed war on drugs, reinvest in communities most harmed by prohibition, replace the illegal market with a safe and regulated one, and support New York farmers and small business owners," said **Senator Liz Kruger**, *Chair of the Senate Finance Committee*. "While we knew there would be challenges in implementing a law as historic as MRTA, we never anticipated that so many would work to stop us from moving forward, thousands of illicit sellers would open before the legal market even got off the ground, or national cannabis corporations would file repeated lawsuits to try to block the prioritization of social equity applicants. I thank my Senate partners for their continued support of MRTA and look forward to working together to make whatever adjustments are needed to ensure that New York develops a sustainable adult-use market that encourages new small businesses, supports New York farmers, and goes some way toward repairing the damage caused by the drug war".

"It's well over two years since recreational marijuana was legalized and not a single dispensary is open in some regions of the state, including the Hudson Valley," said **Senator James Skoufis**, *Chair of the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee*. "This reality reflects a failure to properly implement the law and it's critical the legislature step in,

provide oversight, and advance amendments to the statute, if necessary. I thank Senator Cooney for his leadership on this issue and look forward to righting this ship.”

“I want to express my unwavering support for Senator Jeremy Cooney's recent announcement for a state legislative hearing. It is of the utmost importance to discuss the challenges currently being faced in the legal recreational retail cannabis market,” said **Britni Tantalo**, *CEO New York CAURD Coalition*. “It's clear that the cannabis industry is on the brink of collapsing here in New York State. Senator Cooney's hard work and dedication to the CAURD program and his ability to take action quickly is commendable. It's time for greater transparency and stability within the industry”

“Sunlight is the best disinfectant, and more transparency will help us all turn the New York legal cannabis around before it's too late,” said the **Cannabis Association of New York**. “There is a public health and public safety emergency with the thousands and thousands of illicit dispensaries and smoke shops across New York State. There is already a legal cannabis surplus, which is a crisis for those New Yorkers expecting the Governor's \$150 million social equity fund and the hundreds of DASNY dispensaries. This hearing will provide the valuable opportunity to explore how we got here and record those learned lessons through this hearing's transcripts. However, understanding the past is only one piece of the puzzle; we need clarity on what the future holds. We need to know what is going to happen 3/6/9/12 months from now. People need to know details of how the OCM intends to uphold the promises of the MRTA and SEE plan, and make no mistake, that cannot stop at licensing. If the conditional licensing program has taught us anything it is that simply obtaining a license is not enough. The OCM needs to be accountable to the fluctuating market dynamics they create and the way in which those dynamics affect both current and future licensees.”

“The Association of New York Cannabis Processors represents the operators currently licensed in New York State. We perform the critical role of taking legally farmed cannabis

and turning it into a variety of products enjoyed by consumers. Our membership has collectively invested tens of millions of dollars into a program that was established to allow small hemp processors to thrive,” said the **Association of New York Cannabis Processors**.

“Through a variety of issues that have arisen, that market has not materialized in the more than two years since the MRTA was signed into law. Our members are struggling, laying off workers, and closing their doors. While we do not place blame on any one specific entity, we applaud the opportunity to shine a light on those responsible for a program that has lacked transparency up until this point. Thank you to Senator Cooney and the New York State Senate for showing the leadership necessary to ensure that New York, which will be the biggest and greatest cannabis market in the world, is given the opportunity to succeed.”

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