



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Senator James Sanders Jr. Hosts Marijuana Discussion at Community Clergy Breakfast

JAMES SANDERS JR. March 25, 2019



New York may be the 11th state to legalize the recreational use of marijuana. This month at Senator James Sanders Jr.'s Community Clergy Breakfast held on March 21, 2019 at the Springfield Gardens Church of the Nazarene, he invited subject matter experts and all faith-based leaders to discuss the health, public safety, and economic impact of legalizing marijuana.

Senator Sanders supports the decriminalization, but not the legalization, of marijuana.

"I have seen first-hand what drugs do to the community, and I could not in good faith vote yes on the legalization of marijuana," Sanders said. "If this passes, then what? We are going to have to figure out a bunch of stuff. This thing is going to change your life whether you want it to or not. You are going to have to fight for regulations, so that they don't put a dispensary next to your church. Imagine that."

"We are facing a paradigm shift and when that happens you have to pay attention to how words change," Sanders continued. "It's not pot anymore, its cannabis. There are no dealers. There are no pushers. We have dispensaries. The government is the dealer."

The special guest speakers were representatives from Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM), a bi-partisan, non-profit organization opposed to marijuana legalization and commercialization, which works with local, state, and federal legislators to create policies that decrease marijuana use.

SAM believes that the legalization of marijuana is ineffective and counterproductive and does not address the war on drugs or inequalities in social justice. Rather, they assert that "Big Cannabis" will mirror "Big Tobacco" and will focus on profits, benefiting already wealthy people and special interest groups to the detriment of public health and safety.

The taxes from marijuana sales will be only a very small part of New York's revenue, about 0.17 percent, according to Kevin Sabet, President and CEO, of SAM, noting that this minuscule amount of money will not benefit schools, roads, transportation, or create lower taxes. It is "addiction for profit," he said, just as the scenario with gambling, tobacco, alcohol and pharmaceuticals.

In other states where marijuana is legal, the black market continues to grow, Sabet said. There is also, what he called the “grey market,” where people buy marijuana legally in other states with lower taxes and then sell it illegally in other states, with higher taxes, at a marked down price, similarly to what currently happens with tobacco.

“There is a tremendous underground market that does not go away with legalization,” Sabet said. “You are not going to have a permit to grow marijuana after legalization; it’s only going to be a chosen few.”

We would like to thank Banner International Corporation for sponsoring the event, and Springfield Gardens Church of the Nazarene for allowing us to use their space.

To continue the conversation, join us for a community discussion on this topic, which will be held on April 6, 2019 from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Black Spectrum Theatre, located inside Roy Wilkins Park, at 177-01 Baisley Boulevard, Jamaica, NY 11434. To RSVP, please call Senator Sanders' Office at 718-523-3069 or 718-327-7017.