



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Sanders Talks Money & Polices at Marijuana Legalization Discussion (Part II)

JAMES SANDERS JR. April 9, 2019



State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway) held part two in a series of community conversations about the possible legalization of recreational marijuana in New York State and the impact it could have on communities in Queens. The event took place on Saturday, April 6, 2019 at the Black Spectrum Theatre in Jamaica.

Whereas the first discussion, held on February 2, 2019, examined the potential effects of marijuana on the community in a very general way, the second event dealt with the money

and policies aspect of the issue, focusing specifically how to best structure regulations surrounding marijuana and where to direct taxes derived from pot sales.

“We are here, my friends, because the legalization of marijuana is a moment away in terms of government,” Sanders said. “The only thing that has slowed it down are some technicalities. I am personally not in favor of legalization. I believe, for some, this will be a gateway to other drugs. We need to seriously examine when the government becomes the pusher.” Sanders, however, does support the decriminalization of marijuana.

The event featured guest speakers Shaleen Title, Massachusetts Commissioner of Cannabis Control, and Bradley Usher, Chief of Staff for Senator Liz Krueger.

Senator Kreuger has introduced a bill to legalize, regulate and tax marijuana in New York State. It would subject pot to rules similar to the ones that exist regarding alcohol. The goal is to reverse what Kreuger describes as “decades of costly, counterproductive policies that have produced racially discriminatory outcomes.” Assembly Member Crystal Peoples-Stokes has introduced a companion bill in the Assembly.

Some key points in the bill, known as the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA), include prohibiting the sale of marijuana to individuals under the age of 21, but makes 18 the minimum age for marijuana possession and consumption. It allows home cultivation of up to six marijuana plants; empowers the State Liquor Authority to grant licenses for marijuana production, transport and retail sale; and removes penalties for possession of 2 ounces of marijuana or less.

The Cannabis Control Commission of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a state where both recreational and medical marijuana is legal, aims to develop and enforce regulations to

achieve equity and ensure that those impacted by the war on drugs are prioritized in terms of benefiting from the cannabis industry. “We are trying to cross a bridge that we are building at the same time in a way that is honest and just,” Title said. “We strive to be transparent and honest.”

While there were many different points of view expressed by all in attendance, both panelists and audience members alike, seemed to agree that if marijuana does become legal, it should be regulated in a way that ensures equity so that it isn't just a select group who can profit from cannabis industry. It should also include a robust drug treatment and public education campaign component.

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 Liz Kreuger, Black Ash Cannabis, Cannabis Cultural Association, Canna Clusive, South Jamaica Houses, and The Black Institute.*