



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

George M. Borrello

Senator Borrello Hosts Roundtable with Community Leaders on New York State's New Marijuana Law

GEORGE M. BORRELLO August 25, 2021

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JAMESTOWN – With just a few months left for local government leaders to make decisions on whether to allow the sale of marijuana in their communities and many unanswered questions due to the state's delays in appointing regulators, Senator George Borrello hosted a roundtable with numerous stakeholders to facilitate discussion of the new law and gather input.

Participants included: Assemblyman Andy Goodell, Chautauqua County Executive P.J. Wendel, Jamestown Mayor Eddie Sundquist, Dunkirk Mayor Willie Rosas, Fredonia Mayor Doug Essek, Dunkirk Police Chief Dave Ortolano, Chautauqua County Public Health Director Christine Schuyler, Dunkirk Code Enforcement Officer Ryan Mourer, Chautauqua Works Executive Director Katie Geise, Chamber of Commerce Director Daniel Heitzenrater and Daniel Reininga, President & CEO, Lakeshore Savings Bank.

“I’ve had many local officials and constituents call me with questions on the new marijuana law, seeking information on how various aspects of it should be implemented at the community level as well as the details involved with siting, timelines and other issues pertaining to dispensaries,” said Senator George Borrello. “In most cases, I’ve had to convey to them that the information is simply not available yet because of the state’s delays in appointing members to the control board and state office that are required to establish the regulations.”

“Hosting the roundtable offered an opportunity to get many of these leaders together, in one room, to discuss the rollout of the law – from any impacts they are already experiencing due to the legalization, to questions they have regarding the establishment of a legal market for marijuana. While I’ve been clear about my opposition to legalization over health and safety concerns, now that it’s law, my focus is on helping our communities get the information and support they need to make informed decisions and effectively implement the law. Our conversation last evening was the first step in that process.”

Suggestions and issues raised during the discussion included those below.

- Drug Recognition Expert (DRE) training should become a mandatory part of the training that recruits receive at the New York State Police Academy.
- Because possession and sale of marijuana is prohibited by federal law, many marijuana businesses are unable to use traditional banks and, instead, must conduct business in cash. This creates unique burdens and challenges for vendors as well as for taxing entities, requiring hand-delivered volumes of cash to state tax offices, with armored vehicles and armed guards.
- Other states that have legalized recreational marijuana have seen increases in child welfare cases. What steps will New York State take to mitigate that issue?
- The lack of information on the licensing process and fees has created opportunities for fraud. A local resident shared that she received a request from a family member for \$20,000 to apply for a dispensary license. The state’s lack of information on licensing and fees left her uncertain if his request was legitimate.
- New York State’s law is one of the nation’s most lenient. Among other things, it allows public consumption of marijuana and its permitted possession amounts are among the highest, both of which raise the risks to public health and safety.

“New York State had the advantage of being the 16th state to legalize recreational use of marijuana, which gave us the opportunity to adopt best practices, as well as learn from other states’ mistakes, to craft a responsible law, that mitigates the problems that research tells us accompany legalization,” said Senator Borrello. “From what we’ve seen so far, it doesn’t appear that our state has gone that route. However, we have the opportunity to address some of these concerns through the regulatory process. The questions and suggestions generated by our roundtable will be valuable to those efforts and my ongoing advocacy on this issue.”

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