

Revamping the Office of Cannabis Management: Felicia Reid Speaks

Reid Reshapes New York's Cannabis Future Amidst Turmoil

Felicia A. B. Reid has spent the past six weeks at the helm of New York's Office of Cannabis Management (OCM), inheriting an agency mired in turmoil and transition. Her appointment came in the wake of a scathing review of the state's cannabis rollout, which Governor Kathy Hochul had labeled a "disaster." The investigation revealed inefficiencies, inexperience, and mismanagement within the agency, prompting the resignation of its founding executive director, Chris Alexander. Hochul's choice to replace him was Reid, who now faces the formidable task of steering the agency towards stability and effectiveness.

Reid's tenure has been marked by significant changes in OCM's senior leadership and a broader reorganization effort. In an exclusive interview with NY Cannabis Insider, Reid discussed the current state of the agency, her strategies for reform, and her vision for the future.

A Week in the Life of a Transformational Leader

Reid's approach to leading OCM involves a deep dive into the agency's operations and culture. "I'm about to answer the last six weeks, not just the last week," she says, highlighting her commitment to understanding the full scope of the agency's challenges and opportunities.

Her method involves extensive consultations with staff and stakeholders to gauge their experiences and expectations. "What's good, what's bad, what's ugly," she describes her process, focusing on identifying quick wins and long-term improvements. Reid emphasizes the need for structured communication and consistent processes, areas where she believes OCM has previously fallen short.

Despite the challenges, Reid praises the dedication and passion of OCM's staff. "The people at OCM have an unparalleled amount of passion for this work," she notes. Her experience with the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) contrasts sharply with OCM's vibrant and committed workforce, which she finds inspiring.

Communication and Policy Reform

One of Reid's immediate priorities is improving communication within the agency. She notes that government agencies often fail to engage meaningfully with the public, leading to frustration and distrust. Reid aims to rectify this by streamlining communication channels and ensuring that responses are informative and timely.

"Government gets accused of treating the public at arm's length," she says. "For me, I want to make sure that however we're communicating as an agency, it is a response that has information and has a center."

Reid is also focused on internal policy development. She acknowledges that OCM lacks a robust policy framework, which she views as crucial for consistent and effective operations. Her commitment to developing clear policies and procedures reflects her belief in the importance of structure and predictability in agency work.

Addressing Licensing and Regulatory Challenges

Reid has identified licensing as a critical area for improvement. Applicants have reported frustration with the lack of continuity and clarity in the licensing process. Reid is working to address these issues by establishing a single point of contact for applicants and improving internal systems to reduce delays and confusion.

“We’ve done a lot of work around a single point of contact,” she explains. “No matter who somebody is getting, they can get good information and they know information across the application process.”

The backlog of applications, particularly those from November and December, remains a significant challenge. Reid aims to expedite the process while ensuring that it remains responsive to community needs.

Supporting Growers and Processors

Reid is also focused on supporting the cultivation and processing sectors of the cannabis industry. Drawing from her experience as a master gardener, she understands the complexities of farming and is committed to addressing the unique challenges faced by cannabis growers and processors.

“We need to think about what this industry looks like in two years, five years, ten years,” she says. “How do we make it successful for as many people as possible while understanding that not everyone’s going to be successful?”

Her approach involves listening to feedback from industry stakeholders and adapting policies to support long-term success.

Equity and Leadership Challenges

The absence of a chief equity officer at OCM has been a notable issue, especially given the agency’s focus on equity and social justice. Reid acknowledges the importance of having dedicated leadership for equity but emphasizes that equity should be integrated into every aspect of the agency’s work.

“Equity is in every part of the agency,” she asserts. “How do we ensure that regardless of the action we’re taking, regardless of what we are saying, that we are constantly coming from an equity standpoint?”

The agency is awaiting a decision from the Inspector General regarding the chief equity officer position, but Reid remains committed to making equity a central focus of the agency’s operations.

Looking Ahead: The Next 12 Months

Reid’s vision for the next 12 months involves a comprehensive approach to reform and improvement. She is focused on enhancing the agency’s processes, expanding its impact, and addressing emerging challenges.

“I’m looking forward to wrapping my arms even more around this agency and figuring out what are the things that are coming that we might not even anticipate yet,” she says. “There are so many opportunities we have, because of the mission of the agency, that we could be much more present in.”

As OCM navigates its period of transition, Reid's leadership will be critical in shaping New York's cannabis future. Her commitment to communication, policy development, and equity reflects a determination to overcome past challenges and build a more effective and responsive agency.

Email: info@cannabisriskmanager.com | Phone: +415-226-4060

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