

Unionization Push by Cannabis Workers Amid Labor Concerns

Workers at Salisbury's Apothecarium Cannabis Dispensary Petition to Join Union

Workers at the **Apothecarium marijuana dispensary** in Salisbury, Maryland, are taking steps towards unionizing. Last week, they officially filed a petition with the **National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)** to hold an election to join **United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 27**. If successful, they will be the latest dispensary in Maryland to unionize under the UFCW's guidance.

Inspiration From Other Locations

The Apothecarium, owned by **TerrAscend**, operates four locations in Maryland, including **Burtonsville, Cumberland, Nottingham**, and Salisbury. According to **Jeff Hedrick**, Director of Organizing for UFCW Local 27, the unionization push at Salisbury is part of a larger trend. Workers at the Cumberland location recently voted unanimously to join the union.

Hedrick explained that momentum is growing across the state, with the UFCW supporting four dispensaries in Maryland in their efforts to unionize in 2024 alone.

“One thing feeds off the other,” Hedrick said. “These workers don't really realize the power they have. And, when they see the examples of people getting their own voice and standing up for themselves, it inspires them to do the same.”

Workers Face Various Issues, Union Leaders Say

Hedrick noted that since Maryland rolled out its recreational marijuana market, dispensary workers have been facing several challenges in their work environments.

“Workers in pretty much every cannabis dispensary that you would talk to are having pay issues, they're having issues with scheduling where the employers are posting the schedule the day before the week starts,” Hedrick explained. “They are overworked and understaffed.”

He also added that some employees are unable to take regular breaks due to the high demand in dispensaries, particularly because many dispensaries serve both recreational users and medical patients.

“The workers feel an obligation to take care of the customers and the patients because we still see people who have medical marijuana cards that are suffering from being immunocompromised, they have cancer, things like that,” Hedrick said.

Emphasis on Equity

In Salisbury, workers are still waiting to hear back from the NLRB on when their union vote may be scheduled. Despite the uncertainty, Hedrick is optimistic that unionizing will help build a stronger, more equitable workforce within Maryland's cannabis industry.

Hedrick predicts that a successful push to unionize dispensary workers could make Maryland's marijuana industry more appealing to future employees. He emphasized that unionizing aligns with the state's focus on equity, not only for customers but also for industry stakeholders.

“Part of that comes from the lobbying that organizations like ours have done with the current governor, the previous governor, the legislature in Annapolis, and over in Delaware,” Hedrick said. “[We worked] to get pieces of equity in the cannabis law that are positive for the community, and do a good job of meeting that emphasis on equity.”

The Road Ahead for Cannabis Workers

As the recreational cannabis market continues to expand in Maryland, workers are increasingly turning to unions to help address their workplace concerns. The efforts at the Apothecarium in Salisbury reflect broader trends across the cannabis industry, as employees seek better pay, clearer scheduling, and more fair working conditions.

Whether or not the unionization effort at Salisbury will succeed remains to be seen, but the UFCW's growing presence in Maryland dispensaries suggests that the movement is gaining strength. As the state's cannabis market matures, the voices of dispensary workers seeking better treatment and conditions could play a pivotal role in shaping the industry's future.

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