

Zen Leaf, Teamsters Deal: More Holidays for Cannabis Workers

Zen Leaf Cannabis Workers in Evanston Ratify First Union Contract with Teamsters

Workers at the Zen Leaf cannabis dispensary in Evanston, Illinois, have unanimously approved their first collective bargaining agreement with Teamsters Local 777. This milestone marks a significant achievement for the labor movement within the rapidly growing cannabis industry. Zen Leaf, operated by Verano Holdings (VRNOF), is the latest dispensary to join the ranks of unionized cannabis workplaces under the Teamsters' leadership.

Swift Agreement Reflects Growing Momentum

The negotiation process for the three-year contract was completed in record time, underscoring the momentum unionization efforts have gained in the cannabis sector. Jim Glimco, president of Local 777, celebrated the achievement.

“We successfully negotiated and ratified this collective bargaining agreement in less than three months, which is probably the fastest turnaround we’ve had for a first contract in this industry,” Glimco stated. He attributed the expedited process to the unity and determination of cannabis workers, emphasizing that the Teamsters have become a formidable force in the industry.

Key Benefits of the Agreement

The newly ratified agreement introduces significant improvements for Zen Leaf employees. Highlights of the contract include:

Wage Increases: A minimum 14% wage increase over the three-year term of the contract.

Paid Holidays: Additional paid holidays for all workers.

Job Stability: Provisions to ensure a successor employer honors the contract in case of a dispensary sale.

Due Process: Protection for workers during disciplinary actions.

Retirement Benefits: Union-exclusive retirement plans, offering long-term financial security.

These advancements align with standards set in contracts negotiated for other multi-state cannabis operators in Illinois, such as Cresco Labs and PharmaCann.

Unionization Gains Traction Across the Industry

The ratification at Zen Leaf comes amid a wave of successful unionization efforts led by the Teamsters in the cannabis industry. Workers at PharmaCann, one of the largest vertically integrated cannabis companies in the U.S., recently voted to join Teamsters Local 337 in Michigan.

Similarly, the Teamsters have made strides in unionizing workers at other cannabis companies, including:

The Cannabist Company (California)

Cresco Labs (Illinois)

Grassdoor (California)

Nabis (California)

Verano Holdings (Chicago and other locations)

These victories demonstrate the growing appeal of collective bargaining in securing improved working conditions and job stability within the cannabis sector.

Cannabis Workers See Stability and Respect Through Unionization

Jesse Case, director of the Teamsters food processing division, highlighted the benefits unionization brings to cannabis workers.

“Cannabis workers are organizing and bargaining better contracts faster because they know a Teamsters contract brings stability to their jobs and respect from the industry for the work they do,” Case said.

The inclusion of retirement benefits and guarantees for job security reflect the union’s commitment to addressing long-term worker concerns.

The Broader Impact on the Cannabis Industry

Unionization efforts like those at Zen Leaf are shaping the future of the cannabis industry, which continues to expand rapidly across the United States. By securing contracts that provide competitive wages, job protections, and retirement benefits, unions are setting new standards for the industry.

Moreover, these efforts are challenging the perception of cannabis jobs as unstable or transitional, instead establishing them as viable, long-term careers.

What’s Next for Cannabis Unionization?

As the cannabis industry evolves, the role of unions is likely to become even more significant. States like Illinois, Michigan, and California are leading the charge in unionizing cannabis workplaces, but these efforts are expected to spread nationwide as the industry matures.

For companies, unionization presents both challenges and opportunities. While it may increase labor costs, it also fosters a more satisfied and stable workforce, which can translate to improved business operations and customer satisfaction.

Zen Leaf’s Unionization: A Case Study in Collaboration

The rapid ratification of the contract at Zen Leaf is a testament to effective collaboration between workers, union representatives, and the employer. As Verano Holdings continues to expand its operations, the agreement at Zen Leaf serves as a model for how cannabis companies can work with unions to meet employee needs while supporting business growth.

The unionization of Zen Leaf workers marks another significant step in the Teamsters' efforts to organize the cannabis industry. By securing a robust collective bargaining agreement, employees have gained greater job security, better wages, and valuable benefits.

This achievement not only enhances the working conditions at Zen Leaf but also sets a precedent for other dispensaries and cannabis companies across the country. As unionization continues to gain traction, the cannabis industry is poised for a future that prioritizes stability, respect, and fair treatment for its workers.

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