

# Massachusetts Nears Cannabis Chief; Arkansas Regulator Quits

## Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission Faces Challenges in Filling Executive Director Position Amid Renewed Negotiations

The Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission (CCC), the governing body for the state's adult-use and medical marijuana industries, has found itself at a crossroads yet again as it works to secure a new executive director. The process took another unexpected turn when the commission's initial candidate declined the position, prompting a fresh round of negotiations with the runner-up.

Travis Ahern, the town administrator of Holliston, emerged as the second choice after October interviews with potential candidates, according to the State House News Service. The CCC has now set its sights on Ahern, with acting Chair Bruce Stebbins and Chief People Officer Debra Hilton-Creek tasked with negotiating terms for the position.

### Renewed Negotiations Highlight the Challenges in the CCC's Search for Leadership

The CCC has expressed urgency in resolving the leadership vacancy, agreeing to "reconvene in short order to discuss and decide on next steps" should Ahern also decline the role.

The leadership role has remained vacant since late 2023 when Shawn Collins resigned after serving as the executive director. In the interim, Hilton-Creek has stepped into the role while also maintaining her responsibilities as Chief People Officer.

### The Unexpected Decline of the Initial Candidate Complicates CCC's Plans

The commission initially offered the position to David Lakeman, a former CCC employee, earlier this month. However, Lakeman declined the offer, choosing to remain in Illinois, where he currently leads the marijuana division at the state's Department of Agriculture. Lakeman's decision left the commission in an uncertain position and placed greater scrutiny on the importance of finding the right leadership for the regulatory body.

### Confidence in Ahern Despite Limited Prior Connections

Although Stebbins resides in Holliston, where Ahern works as town administrator, he emphasized that he has had no personal or professional relationship with Ahern before the latter's application for the CCC executive director role.

The commission also voted unanimously to receive regular updates on the progress of negotiations with Ahern and to reconvene promptly if he decides not to accept the offer.

## **Massachusetts' Leadership Void Parallels Challenges in Other States**

Massachusetts isn't the only state grappling with leadership transitions in its marijuana regulatory frameworks. Arkansas is also searching for someone to oversee its medical marijuana industry following the resignation of its regulatory administrator.

Trent Minner, who has been managing the state's medical marijuana, liquor, tobacco, and racing regulations since July 2023, announced his resignation effective Dec. 31. According to the Northwest Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Minner plans to transition to a private-sector position.

## **Broader Implications for Marijuana Industry Oversight**

Leadership changes in state regulatory bodies like the CCC and Arkansas' Department of Finance and Administration underscore the complexities and challenges faced by these agencies. Not only are these positions critical for ensuring compliance and operational efficiency, but they also play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the marijuana industry within their respective states.

For Massachusetts, the CCC's ability to secure stable leadership will significantly influence its efforts to oversee and expand its regulated marijuana markets, which continue to be a cornerstone of the state's economy. As the negotiations with Ahern proceed, all eyes will be on the CCC to see whether it can finalize its search and avoid further delays.

The CCC's next steps will determine not only its immediate operational trajectory but also its ability to maintain public trust in its regulatory oversight of Massachusetts' burgeoning marijuana industry.

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