

## **Rhode Island Opens Applications for 24 New Cannabis Licenses**

### **Rhode Island Cannabis Dispensary License Application Process Officially Launches**

After years of planning and anticipation, Rhode Island has officially opened its application process for new retail marijuana dispensary licenses. The announcement, made Friday by the state's Cannabis Control Commission chairperson Kimberly Ahern, marks a major milestone for the state's growing cannabis industry.

"Today is a significant day for the commission and Rhode Island," Ahern said at the commission's monthly meeting. "This milestone represents the culmination of years of work and collaboration."

#### **Two Dozen New Licenses Up for Grabs**

Regulators are now accepting online applications for 24 retail licenses, which will remain open until 4 p.m. on Monday, December 29. Under the state's 2022 legalization law, the new licenses will be divided among six geographic zones, with a maximum of four stores permitted in each zone.

To promote fairness in the market, six of the licenses are reserved for social equity applicants—individuals or businesses from communities disproportionately impacted by past cannabis prohibition—and another six are set aside for worker-owned cooperatives.

Applicants must pay a \$7,500 application fee and a \$30,000 annual licensing fee. However, social equity applicants will have their application fee waived in the first year.

#### **Social Equity Applicants Already Lining Up**

The commission opened its initial screening process for social equity applicants on August 29. According to Rhode Island Cannabis Administrator Michelle Reddish, 89 individuals and businesses have already applied for certification, which is expected to be finalized by November.

To qualify, applicants must demonstrate a connection to communities disproportionately affected by the War on Drugs, including census tracts in five Rhode Island municipalities identified as areas heavily impacted by past cannabis enforcement.

#### **From Medical Market to Recreational Expansion**

Rhode Island legalized adult-use marijuana in 2022, but implementation has been slow. It took over a year to fully establish the Cannabis Control Commission, which then needed additional time to staff up, draft regulations, and review cannabis policy models from other states.

In the meantime, recreational sales have been limited to the state's seven pre-existing medical dispensaries, which were allowed to convert to "hybrid" licenses. These stores sold a combined \$118 million worth of cannabis products in 2024, according to state figures. So far in 2025, sales through the end of August have already reached nearly \$80 million.

## **Rules and Lottery System**

The regulations approved earlier this year require all applicants to first undergo a screening process to ensure they meet state qualifications. Qualified applicants will then enter a lottery within their respective geographic zones, with winners awarded retail licenses.

Commission officials have pledged to provide technical support and guidance to applicants throughout the process, particularly those pursuing social equity licenses.

## **Looking Ahead**

With the application window now open, Rhode Island is poised to expand its recreational cannabis market beyond the limited medical-to-recreational hybrid system that has dominated sales for the past year.

If successful, the lottery process will diversify ownership in the state's cannabis industry, providing new opportunities for entrepreneurs while further advancing the goals of equity written into the 2022 legalization law.

For Rhode Islanders eager to see new retail options beyond the existing seven hybrid dispensaries, the end of 2025 could bring a wave of new businesses and with them, a reshaped cannabis marketplace.

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