

# Longest Ever Cannabis Strikes Hit Michigan and Pennsylvania

## Ongoing Cannabis Worker Strikes in Two States Are Longest in Industry History

Separate strikes at cannabis companies in Michigan and Pennsylvania have become the longest work stoppages in U.S. marijuana industry history, extending well beyond the previous record of 13 days set in April 2023.

The simultaneous strikes are unfolding under very different circumstances but highlight growing labor tensions in a \$32 billion legal cannabis market already strained by oversupply, consolidation, and economic uncertainty.

### Two Strikes, Different Goals

The work stoppages involve:

- **Exclusive Brands** in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where workers began striking Aug. 28 after management allegedly refused to recognize a union election.
- **Green Thumb Industries' RISE dispensary** in York, Pennsylvania, where Teamsters Local 776 workers walked out Sept. 1 after more than a year of stalled contract negotiations.

At Exclusive Brands, only a handful of workers are striking, focusing their efforts on raising public awareness. In contrast, all eight unionized workers at the York RISE location are withholding labor to directly pressure management.

### Industry Strains and Worker Demands

The strikes come at a challenging time for cannabis workers nationwide. Once touted as a growth sector for organized labor, the marijuana industry is grappling with shrinking profit margins in saturated markets such as Michigan, while multistate operators in limited-license states continue to post healthy revenues.

Meanwhile, inflation and rising costs of living are fueling demands for higher wages. In York, striking RISE workers want a starting wage of \$18 per hour matching what Chicago-area Green Thumb workers won after their 2023 strike. Currently, wages at the York dispensary range from \$16 to \$17.65 per hour.

Mark Cicak, a Teamsters Local 776 organizer, said the York strike will continue “as long as it takes” to secure better pay and benefits.

GTI maintains its most recent offer already included “meaningful wage increases and comprehensive benefits,” according to a company spokesperson.

## Political Context: Trump-Era Labor Climate

Both strikes mark the first cannabis labor disputes under President Donald Trump’s new administration, which is widely seen as more pro-business than the Biden White House.

Union supporters in Michigan argue that Exclusive Brands is testing the limits of federal labor law, appealing to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to rule that cannabis companies are illegal under federal law and thus exempt from worker protections.

At the same time, Teamsters officials in Pennsylvania have filed their own complaint with the NLRB accusing GTI of refusing to bargain. But with the Trump administration still filling NLRB appointments, it is unclear when either case will be addressed.

## Business Realities: Michigan vs. Pennsylvania

The strikes also underscore the starkly different realities of two cannabis markets:

- **Michigan:** A wide-open adult-use market with no license caps, where competition and oversupply have driven down prices despite projected \$3.89 billion in 2025 sales.
- **Pennsylvania:** A medical-only market with limited licenses, considered one of the most profitable environments for multistate operators, generating an estimated \$1.7 billion annually.

GTI, one of the country’s largest cannabis companies, reported more than \$1 billion in revenue last year despite some losses tied to asset sales and debt. Striking workers at the York location are using the company’s public financial disclosures to bolster their case.

“They know the cannabis industry is growing,” Cicak said. “GTI’s profits have to trickle down to the people who make these dispensaries operate.”

## Labor Movement at a Crossroads

The strikes arrive during a period of stalled momentum for cannabis labor organizing. After a flurry of unionization during the Biden years, some workers in states like Illinois and California have voted to decertify unions after failing to secure better wages or working conditions.

Observers say cannabis labor organizers face a structural challenge. “The vast majority of cannabis workers are low-skilled workers who could just as easily be working at a Starbucks,” said Sarah Stith, an economics professor at the University of New Mexico. “They’re more easily replaceable and have less leverage.”

At the same time, companies in oversupplied markets may not have enough revenue to meet worker demands, while in limited-license markets, MSOs appear reluctant to share profits with frontline employees.

# Historic Strikes Could Shape Industry Labor

Whether the Michigan and Pennsylvania strikes end quickly or drag on, they already represent a watershed moment in cannabis labor history.

For workers, the strikes are a test of whether unions can deliver gains in an industry where many remain skeptical. For employers, the outcome may determine whether organized labor becomes a lasting force in cannabis or fades in the face of economic and political headwinds.

As both Exclusive Brands and GTI keep their doors open, strikers say they are determined to hold the line. “This group is smart,” Cicak said of the York workers. “They understand the cannabis industry.”

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