

New Jersey Candidates Must Do More for Cannabis Consumers

The Garden State's Cannabis Boom Is Rewriting Its Economy But Political Leaders Are Barely Taking Notice

The Garden State is experiencing a **quiet economic revolution** driven by legal cannabis. Since New Jersey voters overwhelmingly approved marijuana legalization in 2020, the state's regulated cannabis market has flourished, reshaping the agricultural landscape and injecting **billions of dollars** into the local economy.

Yet as the 2025 gubernatorial race heats up, both leading candidates—**U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ)** and **former Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli (R)**—have largely sidestepped this major policy area.

For nearly three million voters who turned out to support legalization just five years ago, the silence is deafening.

Voters Made Their Voice Clear in 2020, But Politicians Have Gone Quiet

In **November 2020**, New Jersey residents delivered a resounding mandate for marijuana legalization, with **67 percent approval**—a rare moment of bipartisan unity. The victory reflected a broad coalition of voters who saw cannabis reform not just as a social justice issue but also as a **driver of economic growth**.

Despite that decisive vote, cannabis policy has received little attention in the current campaign.

“Nearly three million voters said yes to legalization,” longtime activist **Chris Goldstein** of NORML said. “We’re still out here, waiting for politicians to talk to us again.”

Mikie Sherrill's Support for Federal Cannabis Reform and Cultivation Rights

Rep. Mikie Sherrill, a Democrat and former federal prosecutor, has built a record of supporting marijuana reform at the **federal level**. She voted in favor of the **Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment, and Expungement (MORE) Act**, which sought to remove cannabis from the Controlled Substances Act and expunge certain convictions.

More recently, Sherrill expressed support for **allowing personal cannabis cultivation** in New Jersey: a notable stance given her background in law enforcement.

While her position marks progress, advocates argue she has not yet fully capitalized on cannabis's political popularity in the state. With broad voter support for reform and a thriving industry at stake, **Sherrill could strengthen her campaign** by engaging directly with New Jersey's cannabis consumers and entrepreneurs.

Jack Ciattarelli Softens His Opposition—But Still Stops Short on Adult-Use Rights

On the other side of the political spectrum, **Republican Jack Ciattarelli** has a complicated history with cannabis policy. During his 2021 gubernatorial campaign, he **opposed adult-use legalization outright**, stating that he did not believe recreational cannabis was right for New Jersey.

This year, however, Ciattarelli has **softened his position**, supporting a **bipartisan effort** to allow **home cultivation for medical marijuana patients**. Still, he remains resistant to extending that right to adult-use consumers.

Advocates say Ciattarelli's hesitation ignores the growing reality that cannabis use spans demographics, including the state's older population. "If he realizes how many older voters blaze joints in front of the news every night," Goldstein quipped, "Ciattarelli might still find time for Mary Jane."

Cannabis Has Become a Cornerstone of New Jersey's Agricultural Economy

The Garden State has long been known for its agriculture boasting more than **10,000 farms** that generate roughly **\$1.5 billion annually** in crops like blueberries, soybeans, and nursery products. But those traditional commodities now face a new competitor: **cannabis**.

In 2024, fewer than 200 cannabis operations across the state generated **just over \$1 billion** in retail sales numbers that rival major farming sectors and show no signs of slowing down.

If growth continues at this pace, cannabis could soon surpass traditional agriculture to become **New Jersey's third-largest market**, behind only pharmaceuticals and tourism.

As Goldstein put it: "The Garden State's most popular flower will likely stay in that spot for decades to come. Think about that while you pick some overpriced pumpkins."

The Governor's Office Plays a Central Role in Cannabis Policy

Under **Governor Phil Murphy (D)**, cannabis legalization became a defining issue of his administration. Murphy championed the **Cannabis Regulatory, Enforcement Assistance, and Marketplace Modernization Act (CREAMMA)**, which established the framework for New Jersey's legal market.

The next governor will wield similar power—appointing regulators, shaping cannabis tax policy, and overseeing equity initiatives meant to diversify ownership in the industry.

Future governors could also help **modernize medical marijuana programs**, expand **home cultivation rights**, and **lower consumer prices**, which remain higher than in neighboring states.

"I've always wanted to see a few of our most lucrative plants growing around Drumthwacket," Goldstein joked, referring to the governor's official residence in Princeton.

Key Issues Facing New Jersey's Cannabis Consumers

While legalization has brought new jobs and revenue, New Jersey's cannabis consumers continue to face persistent challenges that demand political attention:

- **High retail prices:** Regulated cannabis remains significantly more expensive than in nearby markets such as Massachusetts and Maryland.
- **No home cultivation:** Residents are still prohibited from growing even small amounts of cannabis for personal use.
- **Neglected medical program:** Patients report limited access and high costs, with some turning back to the illicit market.
- **Equity concerns:** Licensing remains dominated by well-funded operators rather than small, local entrepreneurs.

Each of these issues could become a defining policy area for the next administration—if candidates are willing to engage.

Cannabis Consumers Are Paying the Bills and Expect Representation

New Jersey's cannabis consumers have contributed nearly **\$1 billion in tax revenue** since the launch of legal sales, helping to fund public services, education, and infrastructure.

But as Goldstein notes, the people who provide that revenue have been largely ignored in this year's political conversation. "Plants don't generate profits or taxes," he said. "Every penny comes from the pockets of cannabis consumers like me."

And those consumers, he reminds candidates, are voters too.

The Path Forward: Cannabis Policy as a Voter Issue

As the race for governor intensifies, cannabis policy could prove a **key differentiator** for candidates willing to engage with New Jersey's increasingly powerful cannabis constituency.

With marijuana now firmly embedded in the state's economy, ignoring the industry and its consumers is no longer politically sustainable. The next governor's leadership—or lack thereof will determine whether New Jersey's cannabis boom continues to flourish or stagnates under outdated policies.

Email: info@cannabisriskmanager.com | Phone: +415-226-4060

© Copyright 2025 Cannabis Risk Manager. All Rights Reserved