

# Hearing Highlights: Pennsylvania Lawmakers Tackle Cannabis Justice in Wake of New Legalization Bill

## Pennsylvania Lawmakers Explore Cannabis Legalization with a Focus on Equity

Pennsylvania lawmakers are continuing their deliberations on cannabis legalization, with a recent hearing highlighting the importance of social justice and equity in reform efforts. The discussion comes in the wake of the introduction of a new marijuana legalization bill by *Rep. Amen Brown (D)*, emphasizing safety and social equity as key pillars of the proposed legislation.

Members of the House Health Subcommittee on Health Care convened to hear testimony from a diverse range of advocates and stakeholders, including representatives from the Minority Cannabis Business Association (MCBA), the Parabola Center, and the Diasporic Alliance for Cannabis Opportunities, among others. The focus of the hearing was on addressing broader reform issues, building on previous discussions held by the panel.

*Rep. Dan Frankel (D)*, chair of the full Health Committee, underscored the importance of crafting legislation that promotes public safety, social justice, and revenue generation for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. He emphasized the need to move away from an illicit marketplace towards a regulated framework that benefits both taxpayers and communities.

Laury Lucien, education director for the Parabola Center, emphasized that social equity in cannabis legalization is not charity but rather a form of restorative and reparative justice. She highlighted the need for automatic expungement of criminal records related to cannabis offenses, as well as reducing penalties and ensuring that parolees are not penalized for cannabis activities.

Additionally, Lucien stressed the importance of capping licenses for individual business owners to prevent monopolization and promote a fair and competitive market. Drawing on her experience in Massachusetts, where license caps have been implemented, she emphasized the benefits of such measures in fostering diversity and equity within the industry.

Tahir Johnson, CEO of Simply Pure Trenton and president of MCBA, shared his own experiences as a social equity licensee in the cannabis industry. He highlighted the challenges faced by minority entrepreneurs in accessing capital due to restrictions imposed by traditional banking systems. Johnson emphasized the need for policies that facilitate access to capital for equity applicants, particularly in light of federal prohibition.

William Garriot, a professor at Drake University, provided insights into the principles of social equity in cannabis legalization, emphasizing the importance of addressing the harms of previous policies. He outlined key components of social equity initiatives, including expanding access to the legal cannabis market, reinvesting tax revenue in disproportionately impacted communities, and expunging criminal records for cannabis offenses.

The hearing reflects ongoing efforts by Pennsylvania lawmakers to address cannabis legalization in a comprehensive and equitable manner. While various proposals have been put forward in the past, the path to reform remains uncertain. Governor Josh Shapiro has proposed legalization as part of his budget request, but legislative text has yet to be finalized.

Despite challenges, there is growing momentum for cannabis legalization in Pennsylvania, driven by public support and recognition of the need for social justice and equity in reform efforts. As lawmakers continue to engage with stakeholders and explore policy options, the path forward for cannabis legalization in the state will depend on finding consensus and addressing key concerns surrounding equity, public safety, and revenue generation.

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