

ALLIANCE NEWS



Alliance for Better Communities

SPECIAL EDITION

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MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION: WHERE IT STANDS

BY: MARTIN J. ROTHSCHILD, JD.

Governor Cuomo has strongly supported legalization of marijuana for recreational use, but legislation has been stalled due to Covid-19. The governor has stated that legalization will now have to wait until next year. He has asserted that legalization will raise state revenues, lower incarceration rates and allow businesses to get a piece of the growing cannabis sector. Prior to the pandemic, it appeared virtually certain that the legislature would approve legalization. While there is still opposition from some, polling by Siena College has shown that 58% of registered voters favor legalization. Senator Jen Metzger, Democrat from Ulster County stated: ***“It makes no sense to me that cannabis and alcohol are treated differently under the law when cannabis poses less health risks than alcohol, is less addictive and there is no empirical evidence that marijuana is a ‘gateway drug’ to other types of drug use.”***¹



Contrary to the Governor’s position, the New York State Catholic Conference has urged the legislature to reject legalization. Referencing the impact of the Coronavirus, the organization stated: ***“It would be the height of irresponsibility for the state to legalize a substance designed to be inhaled deeply into the lungs of the user at this time in particular.”*** Emphasized was the fact that there is as yet no scientific evidence concerning the effect of marijuana smoke on patients suffering from disease caused by the virus. The Bishops leading the organization have advocated against what they refer to as “destructive behavior” predominantly to raise tax revenue. They have asserted: ***“Vice is not an appropriate economic development engine for a state that prides itself as a national progressive leader.”*** The health and social concerns they have cited include harmful effects of the drug on young developing brains, progression to harder drugs, accidents and deaths caused by impairment

and addiction.²

There has also been a push towards legalization fueled by the national movement for social justice reform and increased police transparency. The proposed Safer NY Act deals primarily with police reform, but also includes provisions to legalize adult cannabis use. Senators advocating for passage of the bill allege that criminalization impacts



communities of color disproportionately. Sen. Julius Salazar (D) asserts that as a result, more black and brown New Yorkers have police interactions and end up in the criminal justice system. She said that the state's 2019 decriminalization legislation did not go far enough and that ***"it's not enough until we fully make it legal and we stop criminalizing people for using it, especially for using it responsibly, and stop criminalizing people for something that is completely legal within driving distance of our state."*** The Majority Leader of the Assembly, Crystal Peoples-Stokes (D) had hoped that legalization would be achieved in 2020, but she acknowledges that the Pandemic creates challenges to passage.³

Jim McGovern, head of the U.S. House of Representatives Rules Committee, believes that recreational marijuana should be legalized on the federal level. The house recently passed a bill, seen as a first step, that allows cannabis related businesses in states with existing regulatory structures to access the banking system. However, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has been unwilling to consider the bill. Supporters of the bill contend that federal inaction has hindered the development of a well-regulated adult-use market.⁴

As legalization of pot continues throughout the United States, it is likely that increasingly potent varieties will become available for consumption. A study conducted at the University of Bristol in England demonstrated an increased likelihood of mental health problems from use of high-potency vs. lower-potency cannabis. Data was collected from participants aged 24 years who had reported using the drug in the previous year. Users of high-potency strains were four times more likely to report associated problems, and twice as likely to report anxiety disorder, than users of lower-potency strains. The researchers concluded that the number of people developing cannabis use disorders could be reduced by legally limiting the availability of high-potency varieties of the drug.⁵

The debate rages on as to whether it is better to control the supply, purchase, and use of marijuana through legalization, or ban its consumption. Regardless, it appears inevitable that pot will be declared legal for recreational adult-use in New York sometime in 2021.

THE PANDMIC RAGES ON: ALLIANCE MEETING STAYS ONLINE FOR JULY

Planning Discussion on Employment Problems and Solutions for People in Recovery



John Rork-Anchor Recovery



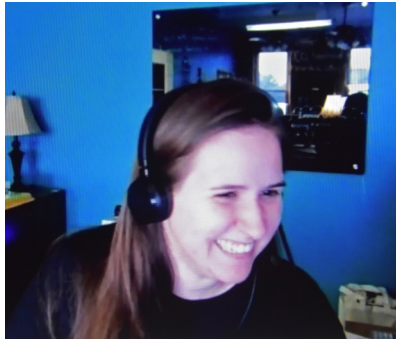
Kylie Peck-Pres. & C.E.O. Watertown Chamber of Commerce



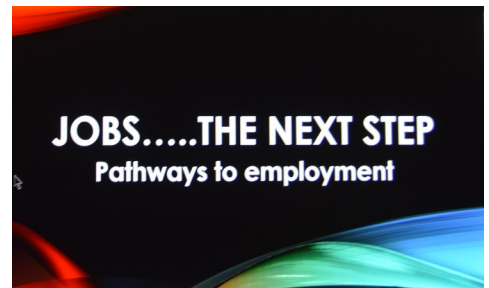
Cheryl Mayforth-Dir. The Workplace



Cassie Forbus- Lewis County



Alex Mitchell- SVPC



Chairman Jennings



M. Gault

Chat

Martin Rothschild

From K P to Everyone:
Kylie Peck, Watertown Chamber of Commerce, kpeck@watertownny.com

From Cynthia Getman-Hubbard to Everyone:
Cynthia Getman-Hubbard Anchor Recovery Center cgetman-hubbard@anchorrecoverycenter.com

From cherylm to Everyone:
Cheryl Mayforth, The Workplace

From Mary Hughes-Hoiston to Everyone:
Mary Hughes- Hoiston Samaritan Addiction Services

From mgault to Everyone:
Melinda Gault, CAPC mgault@capjc.org, 315-782-4900

From Andrea Smith to Everyone:
Andrea Smith, Credo Community Center, andreas@credocc.com

From Bill Van Orman to Everyone:
Bill Van Orman Fort Drum Army Substance Abuse Program William.c.vanorman.civ@mail.mil

From Andrea Mazzini to Everyone:
Andrea Mazzini - Narcan (mazzinia@ebsi.com)

From Stephen Jennings - Jefferson County to Everyone:
Please all mute.

From Meggin to Everyone:
Meggin Burns-mburns@keuka.edu



Martin Rothschild, J.D.

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Why are overdose deaths surging amid COVID-19?

Author: [Margaret Williams, MD](#)

Excerpted from: <https://wexnermedical.osu.edu/blog/why-are-overdose-deaths-surg-ing-amid-covid-19>

As the global COVID-19 pandemic continues, opioid overdose deaths are surging nationwide.

The increase in opioid overdose deaths is likely linked to COVID-19 restrictions and closures that have hindered access to treatment and recovery services for those suffering from substance-abuse disorder.

The American Medical Association issued a report stating that it's "greatly concerned by an increasing number of reports from national, state, and local media suggesting increases in opioid-related mortality—particularly from illicitly manufactured fentanyl and fentanyl analogs.

In addition, the AMA reports a strong need for evidence-based, harm-reduction services, including sterile needle and syringe services and naloxone.

...Young adults are most affected, with death rates doubling over last year. The unintended consequences of social distancing during the COVID-19 outbreak may be behind these increases.

Contact Us

Give us a call for more information

Alliance for Better Communities

315-788-4660

167 Polk St., Suite 320

Aseefried-brown@pivot2health.com

Visit us on our Facebook page
www.facebook.com/allianceforbettercommunities

Excessive alcohol consumption could worsen coronavirus pandemic

By [Justine Lofton](#)

Excerpted from: <https://www.mlive.com/news/2020/07/excessive-alcohol-consumption-could-worsen-coronavirus-pandemic.html>

...Turning to alcohol to cope with stress may seem like a good idea, but data suggests that Americans are drinking much more than usual and that can lead to increased health risks, the American Heart Association said in a news release. That includes compromised immune systems, reducing the body's ability to fight off infectious diseases such as COVID-19.

Nielsen, a global marketing research firm, reports alcohol sales in stores were up 54% in late March compared to same period in 2019. Online sales were up almost 500% in April. A Morning Consult poll of 2,200 U.S. adults conducted in early April showed that 16% of adults were drinking more during the pandemic, with higher rates among younger adults: One in four Millennials and nearly one in five Gen Xers said their alcohol intake was up.