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**MAYOR DE BLASIO CALLS FOR FAIR CANNABIS LEGALIZATION THAT  
PROMOTES EQUITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL**

*Report promotes small business development, redressing impacts of past criminalization and driving economic opportunity to historically marginalized communities*

**NEW YORK**—Mayor Bill de Blasio today endorsed the safe and fair legalization of cannabis in New York. The Mayor also released his Task Force report on Cannabis Legalization, which calls for a strong, public health-focused regulatory framework and the empowerment of local government to prevent corporate greed, foster small businesses and meet the demands of New York City communities. The report also places great emphasis on the need to ensure that any marijuana industry in New York City right the wrongs of the past and promotes economic opportunity.

“I have been convinced that we can establish a regulatory framework that keeps our streets safe, rights the wrongs of the past, and gives economic opportunity to communities hit hardest by the war on drugs,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “I support legalization because we’ve developed a path forward that will help make our City fairer. I look forward to working with the State as to make this a reality.”

“As we go down the path toward legalization of marijuana in our city and state, let us recognize that it is not without risks,” said **First Lady Chirlane McCray, who leads the City’s mental health and substance misuse efforts**. “We must do everything we can to protect our city’s young people, and educate all New Yorkers about marijuana use. That’s why this report is so important, and I urge state lawmakers use the recommendations as a guide for their work in the months ahead.”

“I have long supported the legalization of recreational marijuana, and I am looking forward to reviewing these recommendations. Although whites, blacks and Latinos smoke marijuana at roughly the same rates, minorities have been arrested disproportionately for low-level marijuana possession. We have a responsibility to undo these past wrongs. As New York looks to move

forward with decriminalizing marijuana, we must ensure that part of the conversation includes expunging convictions of people with low-level possession offenses,” said **Council Speaker Corey Johnson**.

The report, *A Fair Approach to Marijuana*, was produced by the Mayor's Task Force on Cannabis Legalization, which was convened in July 2018 to identify the goals and challenges that should guide the City’s preparations for potential legalization.

The recommendations are centered on local development, equity, public health and a wholesale departure from the failed war on drugs. These include the automatic expungement of criminal records for conduct that would be legalized – subject to notice and opportunity by District Attorneys’ Offices to raise objections in specific cases; educational resources for youth, educators, consumers, health care workers; the elimination of routine testing as prerequisite to social service benefit eligibility and the prohibition of pre-employment and random testing, with some narrow exceptions.

It also calls for balancing State regulatory structures with local authority to permit licensed consumption sites, determine business density restrictions to avoid over-concentration and allow localities to restrict or prohibit home cultivation. The report also makes recommendations to prevent big business from market domination by instituting a licensing system that would create opportunities for small businesses.

If legalized, the City would seek to:

- **Establish an Equitable Licensing System:** Create local licensing programs, regulate public places of consumption, regulate home and commercial cultivation and manufacturing, and regulate home delivery services.
- **Preserve Communities:** Establish zoning and area restrictions for cannabis businesses, as well as restrictions on the density to determine how the location of cannabis businesses can best fit into the fabric of its communities.
- **Protect Public Health:** Enforce age limits of 21 and over with civil rather than criminal penalties to violations of cannabis regulations to the greatest extent possible consistent with public safety.
- **Right Historic Wrongs:** Recommend automatic expungement of criminal records relating to conduct that may be legalized, including personal use and possession of certain quantities – subject to notice and opportunity by District Attorneys’ Offices to raise objections in specific cases.
- **Ensure Product Safety:** Recommend statewide standards for product safety, labeling and packaging, marketing, and advertising, as well as a mandatory seed-to-sale tracking

system accessible to State and local regulators and financial institutions serving cannabis-related businesses.

- **Put Small Businesses First:** Work with State authorities to reduce the risk of market domination by big businesses and foster sustainable growth, in part, by restricting businesses from owning and controlling each stage of the supply chain, which may otherwise be owned by different, specialized businesses.
- **Create Equal Opportunity:** Participate in a dual state-local licensing structure that will permit the City to pursue its own innovations to promote economic opportunities created by this new market, subject to the minimum standards set by the State.
- **Ease Access to Capital:** Advocate for legislation expressly providing that banking and professional services for cannabis-related businesses do not violate State law.
- **Make Fair Investments:** Allocate tax revenue, licensing fees, and other sources of financing to administer the new industry and support cannabis businesses and workers, with a focus on target populations and community reinvestment.
- **Build Local Businesses:** Develop an incubator program to provide direct support to equity applicants in the form of counseling services, education, small businesses coaching, and compliance assistance.

The above recommendations would follow a series of steps by the Administration that have successfully reduced arrests for marijuana in New York City.

The Task Force was coordinated by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice and includes representatives of relevant City agencies. The Task Force was divided into five subcommittees – focused on Licensing and Land Use; Economic Opportunity; Taxation and Finance; Law Enforcement and Social Justice; and Public Health, Social Services and Education – that met regularly to develop the recommendations reflected in the Task Force report. Members consulted with experts both supportive and opposed to legalization and studied jurisdictions that have regulated the adult use of cannabis.

In November of 2014, the NYPD changed its policy to issue criminal summonses instead of arresting for possession of marijuana in open view. That policy led to a 37 percent decline in arrests from 2014 to 2015. Then, in September 2018, the NYPD began issuing criminal summonses instead of making arrests for marijuana consumption in public. Since this change in policy for public consumption enforcement, arrests are down 80.6 percent and summonses are also down 30 percent.

To see the entire report of the Mayor's Task Force on Cannabis Legalization, click [here](#). To see a quick cannabis fact sheet, click [here](#).

“As New York moves closer to creating a legal market, which my office has shown will generate billions of dollars, we must prioritize correcting historic injustices and backwards policies of the past,” said **New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer**. “We know that lower income Black and Latinx New Yorkers have been hit hardest by marijuana enforcement, and they should be the first to benefit from legalization. That means developing a cannabis equity program and investing in these communities – it’s the only way forward.”

**Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark** said, “I commend the Mayor’s Task Force for its thorough and considered report, which looks at public safety and quality-of-life aspects of legalization of marijuana. The recommendations recognize the importance of having safeguards in place. The recommendations also dovetail with what my Office has been doing for the past three years, in terms of dismissing low-level quality of life offenses that have an impact on employment, housing and education opportunities. The time has come for the state legislature to seriously consider decriminalizing marijuana and providing a uniform approach to vacating marijuana convictions, to ensure fairness for residents of the Bronx and throughout New York State.”

**Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez** said, “Brooklyn has been leading the effort to reform marijuana enforcement since 2014, when we stopped prosecuting low level marijuana possession cases, through yesterday, when we took the significant step of erasing past convictions for the first time in New York State history. Our borough was ground zero for disparate enforcement of marijuana offenses during the stop and frisk era, and any legalization effort must include clearing old records and other policies that will correct the harm done to communities of color in the past. I commend Mayor de Blasio for outlining a plan that is consistent with these principals.”

**Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance, Jr.** said, “My Office began declining to prosecute marijuana possession and smoking cases on August 1. We did so because our research found virtually no public safety rationale for the criminal prosecution of pot smoking, and certainly no justification for the racial disparities underlying enforcement. The Mayor’s Task Force report echoes these critical findings and lays out a safe, fair, and comprehensive framework for New York to legalize, regulate, and expunge. I am proud to join forces with Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray on this critical endeavor, and I thank them and the members of the Task Force for their leadership and hard work.”

**State Senator-elect Robert Jackson** said, “I support the legalization of marijuana, but importantly it must be done the right way. We need to educate of its risks, regulate to provide only safe adult access and we need to prioritize the benefits for communities that have been most harmed by the War on Drugs. The Mayor’s Task Force on Cannabis Legalization has provided a good framework to end the racial injustice of our drug policy and move our state forward in a smart, sensible and equitable way.”

“Too many in our city have had their lives adversely impacted as a result of our states outdated cannabis prohibition laws,” said **Assemblyman David I. Weprin, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Correction**. “By legalizing cannabis in a safe and fair way, we can ensure that

different communities are no longer disproportionately affected by the prohibition and that consumption will be regulated in the best interest of the public health. I look forward to the establishment of a strong regulatory framework for the legalization of adult-use cannabis and applaud Mayor Bill de Blasio on his Task Force report on Cannabis Legalization.”

“The priority of cannabis legalization must be to deliver social justice to the communities that have historically been harmed by the racist and classist war on drugs. In Albany, I will be working alongside my colleagues to pass a bill that addresses past injustices through the funding of community development programs with revenue from a cannabis tax, the vacation of old cannabis-related convictions, and by designating a significant share of licenses to operate a cannabis business to Black and Latino entrepreneurs. We must work to accomplish a legalization that strongly protects the health of New Yorkers – especially our children. I look forward to working with a mayoral administration that shares these core beliefs on this issue,” said **Assembly Member Harvey Epstein**.

“Prohibition has resulted in unfair and unequal enforcement, and whatever harm overuse of cannabis may cause, more and more people are coming to the realization that prohibition’s consequences are worse,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. “If a legalized marijuana industry is going to move forward, we need to think and plan seriously for what comes next. A range of public health concerns will need to be addressed, injustices will need to be corrected, and rules will need to be crafted that work for local communities.”

"We've come a long way to finally get to the point where legalizing marijuana is an inevitability in New York State, but there is so much work left to do to ensure we right the wrongs of our past by expunging all marijuana related criminal records, reinvesting in communities who were disproportionately impacted by law enforcement and ensuring that we place a focus on MWBEs and invest in small business owners in need of capital," said **Council Member Donovan Richards, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety**. "Mayor de Blasio's Task Force recommendations show that he is on board, focused on the issues that matter to those impacted and committed to investing in communities of color throughout the City. While there are still many questions and policies to work out, I look forward to working with the administration moving forward and thank Mayor de Blasio and the entire Task Force."

"Marijuana enforcement has long been discriminatory towards communities of color and has been a primary instrument in establishing the New Jim Crow, whereby hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are today restricted in where they can live, work, and go to school because of a prior marijuana conviction. I'm optimistic that the Mayor's leadership on marijuana legalization and conviction expungements can finally help rectify this injustice," said **Council Member Rory Lancman, Chair of the Committee on the Justice System**.

“New York can no longer be stuck in the past – it’s long past time that we legalize marijuana. Now we need to ensure as we move towards legalization that we are investing revenues and regulatory resources in our communities of color which bore the brunt of unjust drug laws for decades, and working to expunge criminal marijuana records as well,” said **Council Member Carlina Rivera**.

"The recommendations laid out by the task force are a powerful statement on the opportunity and the necessity of ending the destructive criminalization of marijuana and creating a legal industry for the advancement of the very communities impacted by this prohibition. As I and other advocates have argued for years, the first priority should be the state finally legalize cannabis needs to be restoration and reinvestment in the lives ruined by the senseless and hysterical ban on marijuana, through expungement and advancement. I am glad that the Administration, and the city, stand ready to act once the state enacts legalization, and look forward to advancing the implementation of many of these positive policies, including legislation, which I sponsor and for which I have long advocated," said **Council Member Jumaane D. Williams**.

"This is a clear road map to ending the prohibition on marijuana and ensuring the benefits of legalization go to Black and brown communities that were devastated by the racist war on drugs," said **Dahlia McManus, Deputy Director of the New York Working Families Party**. "We thank Mayor de Blasio for his leadership on this issue, and we'll work hard to build support in the legislature so that these recommendations can become a reality."

"Disparate marijuana prohibition and prosecution has plagued our clients - the majority from communities of color - for decades, and legalization will begin fixing this problem," said **Anthony Posada, Supervising Attorney of the Community Justice Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. "We are glad that Mayor Bill de Blasio supports legalization through a framework that is centered on empowering black and brown neighborhoods with the economic benefits of legalization, focused on repairing past wrongs through the automatic expungement of criminal records, and ensuring diversity and access to the industry."

"I have been working with young people for the last 30 years and the recreational use of marijuana has been a major issue. I want to thank Mayor Bill de Blasio for having the courage to move forth with the legalization of recreational marijuana. This legalization of recreational marijuana will definitely stop the disproportionate arrest and punishment for marijuana which often ended up with black and Latino males on Rikers Island for small quantities with long incarceration periods while awaiting trial. These arrests further impacted young people's acceptance into college and to obtain jobs. Once again thank you Mayor de Blasio for your leadership," said **Iesha Sekou, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of Street Corner Resources**.

"The Mayor's approach to legalization is one that prioritizes justice," said **Nelson Guerrero of Cannabis Cultural Association NORML, a local New York advocate**. "The emphasis on the expungement of records, local ownership, and promoting economic opportunities in disenfranchised communities will clear a path for a vibrant and prosperous transition from prohibition to a regulated market that safely and effectively serves consumers. The timing of this legislative plan couldn't be better,"

"We know how important drug use is to the for profit prison system, the deportation system, the multiple cruel punishment systems with which we have found ourselves, and we can no longer pretend to be blind to the exquisite harms of racialized drug policies. Legalizing cannabis could right many wrongs — those of non-forgiveness, those of racial justice, those of constitutional power. It would also give us a strong lens with which to examine the myriad ways

white supremacy has been institutionalized. Black and brown people do drugs and are criminalized and brutally policed, while white people are wrapped in resources, funding, treatment in compassion. What a perfect view on a system gone wrong for too long. Legalizing cannabis will help us all down the road to equity and racial justice. I speak as a white person and a Christian, one who follows the Jesus who would surely have legalized drug use and other forms of harm reduction,” said **Reverend Donna Schaper, Senior Minister, Judson Memorial Church and Min. Erica Poellot, Judson Memorial Church and NYC Harm Reduction Coalition.**

"Legalizing the sale and recreational use of marijuana is long overdue. We must now work to free all persons, especially black and brown young people, who are incarcerated for activity from which corporations will now profit," said **Reverend Fred Davie, Vice President of Union Theological Seminary.**

“New York State is on the cusp of ending our failed war on marijuana and taking a tremendous step to legalize marijuana for adult use. In order for legalization to be responsive to the landscape of harm done in New York, we absolutely must remove criminal records, implement legalization in a way that ensures equity and diversity, and direct tax revenue from legal sales toward rebuilding the communities hit hardest by marijuana criminalization. NYC can lead and it should,” said **Kassandra Frederique, Drug Policy Alliance NY State Director.**

“We applaud the work of the Mayor and the efforts of the Task Force – as we continue to look at violence as a public health issue, we want to ensure that Black and Brown communities who experienced extremely disproportionate penalties for cannabis receive the tools they need to recover/heal, up to and including full restitution. There is no way to compensate for the years lost by every family affected by the criminalization of what will now be legal – however, at a minimum, we must ensure that in addition to release and expungement, there are direct economic reparations to these marginalized communities significantly impacted by the war on drugs, who have been incarcerated for something that is not only no longer a crime, but that the city now stands to benefit from financially. As an equitable public health response, Black and Brown communities must be at the core of small business opportunities, education, and other equitable public health responses to heal from the trauma of aftermath of the war on drugs and to repair harms of the past. The war on drugs was waged on our communities, and the restoration and healing from that war must be guided by us,” said **Erica Ford, Co-Creator of NYC Crisis Management System & CEO of LIFE Camp Inc.**

"Mayor de Blasio's task-force and its report are remarkable in a number of ways. But most importantly, they demonstrate the power of our local government to create enormous and positive change for the communities that need it most. The fact is that Black and Latino communities in New York City's low-income neighborhoods have been unfairly and disproportionately targeted by the city's antiquated marijuana policies for decades. The measures recommended by the task-force stand to right these generations-old wrongs; level a new sector's economic playing-field; and turn racist policies and practices on their head to lift up poor communities and communities of color that have, for so long, been ground down by oppression. We applaud the recommendations of Mayor de Blasio's task-force and support the creation of a

well-regulated and inclusive legal marijuana industry,” said **George T. McDonald, Founder and President of the Doe Fund.**

“I applaud Mayor De Blasio in his support for legalizing Marijuana and supporting expungement. This will surely equalize the playing field,” said **Ms. Leora Keith, President of Tompkins Houses Resident Association and First Vice Chair of Brooklyn West.**

“The legalization of Marijuana needs to happen! The injustice has to come to an end. Thank you for your support,” said **Ms. Cynthia Simpson, President of Marcy Houses Resident Green Committee.**

“I applaud any effort that brings restorative justice to redress the wrongs of the ‘war on drugs’. It is my great hope that as this industry emerges, there is equity in access and continued attention to how communities of color are affected by our policies,” said **Reverend Kaji Dousa, Senior Minister of the Park Avenue Christian Church**

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