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# *Public Meeting*

of

## THE NEW JERSEY LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS

*“Recreational Marijuana Hearings; second of three”*

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**LOCATION:** Mount Teman A.M.E. Church  
160 Madison Avenue  
Elizabeth, New Jersey

**DATE:** March 27, 2018  
10:00 a.m.

### **MEMBERS OF CAUCUS PRESENT:**

Senator Ronald L. Rice, Chair  
Assemblywoman Shavonda E. Sumter, 2nd Vice Chair  
Assemblyman Jamel C. Holley  
Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey



### **ALSO PRESENT:**

Senator Joseph Cryan  
*District 20*

Senator Nicholas P. Scutari  
*District 22*

Assemblywoman Annette Quijano  
*District 20*

Patricia Perkins-Auguste  
*Councilwoman-at-Large*  
*City of Elizabeth*

*Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by*  
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,  
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Reverend Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones Senior Pastor Bethany Baptist Church	2
Reverend Dr. Charles F. Boyer Pastor Bethel A.M.E. Church, Woodbury	3
Kevin A. Sabet, Ph.D. President and Chief Executive Officer Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM), and Director Drug Policy Institute University of Florida	13
Morgan Thompson Director Academic and Recovery Support Services Prevention Links, and The Raymond J. Lesniak Experience Strength and Hope Recovery High School	20
Mike Smeraglia Private Citizen	23
Corinne LaMarca Gasper Private Citizen	27
Luke D. Niforatos Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM)	31
Safeer Quraishi Administrative Director Public Policy and Civil Rights Advocacy New Jersey State Conference National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)	37

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Bishop Jethro C. James, Jr. Senior Pastor Paradise Baptist Church, and President Newark/North Jersey Committee of Black Churchmen, and Chaplain New Jersey State Police, and Senior Advisor New Jersey Responsible Approaches to Marijuana Policy (NJ RAMP)	41
Jaleel Terrell Policy Advocate New Jersey Parents' Caucus	46
Pamela Capaci Executive Director Prevention Links	46
Reverend George E. Britt Pastor Mount Teman A.M.E. Church	55
Rory Joseph Wells, Esq. Former Assistant Prosecutor Ocean County Prosecutor's Office	59
Marco Vasquez Executive Fellow Police Foundation	63
John J. Zebrowski, Esq. Chief of Police Borough of Sayreville, and Executive Vice President New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police (NJSACOP)	71
Melissa Tassé, Ph.D. Chief Executive Officer and Founder The Honey Bee Foundation	76

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Edward Latimer, M.D. Private Citizen	81
J. Calvin Chatlos, M.D. Representing New Jersey Responsible Approaches to Marijuana Policy (NJ RAMP)	83
Kristine De Jesus, Psy.D. Founder and Recovery/Life Coach The Wellness Cooperative	83
Peter Brown, Jr. Councilman 3rd Ward City of Linden	93
Wayne Smith Chairman of the Board International Youth Organization, and Mayor Emeritus Township of Irvington	98
Diane Litterer Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director New Jersey Prevention Network	98
Virgil Grant III President and Co-Founder Southern California Coalition, and Co-Founder California Minority Alliance	105
Raymond L. Hamlin, Esq. Founding Partner Hunt, Hamlin & Ridley	111

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Kabili Tayari Private Citizen	118
Salaam Ismial National Director National United Youth Council, Inc., and Co-Chair New Jersey Study Commission on Violence	123
Sammie Muhammad Chair Elizabeth Local Organized Committee	125
Imam Abdul-Kabir Shamsid-Deen Private Citizen	128
Dianna Houenou, Esq. Policy Counsel American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey	135
Leo Bridgewater, Sr. Founding Board Member New Jersey Cannabis Commission (NJCC), and President New Jersey/New York Chapters Minorities for Medical Marijuana	139
<b>APPENDIX:</b>	
Testimony submitted by Reverend Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones	1x
Testimony submitted by Kevin A. Sabet, Ph.D.	6x
Testimony submitted by Morgan Thompson	13x

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

### APPENDIX (continued)

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Testimony submitted by Mike Smeraglia	15x
Testimony submitted by Corinne LaMarca Gasper	18x
Testimony submitted by Luke D. Niforatos	20x
Testimony submitted by Safeer Quraishi	26x
Testimony submitted by Bishop Jethro C. James, Jr.	31x
Testimony submitted by Jaleel Terrell	34x
Testimony submitted by Rory Joseph Wells, Esq.	37x
Testimony submitted by Marco Vasquez	39x
Testimony submitted by John J. Zebrowski, Esq.	43x
Testimony submitted by Melissa Tassé, Ph.D.	48x

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

### APPENDIX (continued)

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<i>Marijuana is Not a Harmless Herb</i>	
Case Studies submitted by J. Calvin Chatlos, M.D.	56x
Testimony submitted by Kristine De Jesus, Psy.D.	92x
Testimony, plus news articles submitted by Wayne Smith	96x
Testimony submitted by Raymond L. Hamlin, Esq.	100x
Testimony, plus Fact Sheets submitted by Dianna Houenou, Esq.	109x
Testimony submitted by Filomena Frantantoni Private Citizen	115x
Testimony, plus Fact Sheet submitted by Roseanne Scotti New Jersey State Director Drug Policy Alliance	116x
Fact Sheets submitted by New Jersey United for Marijuana Reform (NJUMR)	119x
pnf:1-145	

SENATOR RONALD L. RICE (Chair): Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to the Legislative Black Caucus.

*(Due to technical difficulties, the opening remarks portion of the hearing was not recorded nor could be transcribed. A video of the proceedings can be viewed in their entirety at <http://www.njblackcaucus.org/videos/>)*

SENATOR RICE: The Black Caucus has not taken a position, pro or con, on the legalization or the decriminalization of marijuana. We, like our colleagues who are not of color, have our own individual opinions about what we think. The hearings are to get a clear record.

I want to thank Senator Scutari and Senator Cryan for their remarks. I also want to let the Senators know there is no monopoly on brains, and opinions, and research as it relates to those of us in the Legislature. And I have no problem debating those issues in a setting like this with the Senators and legislative members who have taken various positions. I think at some point in time maybe we need to do that so the record can be set straight about some of these Jim Crow laws that have been made in this country.

What I need to do, at this time -- we are starting the hearing. I need to call up Reverend Charles Boyer, the Pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church of Woodbury.

Is he here?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SHAVONDA E. SUMTER (2nd Vice Chair): Yes, he's here.

SENATOR RICE: That's him? (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Let me just say this to you. You're trying so hard to clap; and I know that Bishop James said we clap in church. But today we don't clap in church. (laughter) I have to keep this record and this transcribing going correctly. So just please bear with me so I don't have to show off in church (laughter). And I'm not talking about dancing. (laughter)

So I also want to bring up Reverend Willie Dwayne Francois, Pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church.

Is the Reverend here? (no response)

And if he's not here, I also want to bring up Reverend Timothy Jones, Pastor of Bethany Baptist Church.

Is Reverend Jones here? How are you doing, Reverend?

**REVEREND TIMOTHY LEVI ADKINS - JONES:**  
(off mike) Excellent.

SENATOR RICE: Okay.

Reverend Boyer, thank you and welcome; Reverend Jones, thank you.

Just make sure when you testify -- we have to keep this somewhat short, because in all deference to those of us who live in New Jersey, and those of us who are having hearings all over the place, that I have people from out of state who have to make some flights. So I'm going to try to work through this and try to give them enough time also to make their presentations prior to leaving.

But on the record, anyone who is speaking -- please state your name and your representation as it relates to your organization or whatever, okay?

So I don't know who wants to go first.

Reverend Boyer.

**REVEREND DR. CHARLES F. BOYER:** All right; thank you, Senator Rice.

Reverend Charles Boyer, Pastor, Bethel A.M.E. Church in Woodbury, New Jersey.

I'm also representing Salvation and Social Justice.

You have asked the impossible task, Senator for two black preachers to get done quick; but we will do it. (laughter)

Let me--

**SENATOR RICE:** Well, if you go straight to scripture, you can get through it. (laughter)

**REVEREND BOYER:** Yes, we're going, we're going straight. (laughter)

So the question is often asked how is it that I can be supportive--

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER:** Can you pick up the mike that amplifies?

**REVEREND BOYER:** Okay.

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER:** That would definitely-- Yes. And just leave that one there; just pick up the mike that's-- Leave that one there -- right -- and use that one.

REVEREND BOYER: Yes; all right. It has a short wire, but we'll make it work.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: There you go.

REVEREND BOYER: --of how I can be supportive of legalization.

Just to be clear: I am not in support of recreational use of marijuana. As a faith leader, obviously, and a sober mind, I want to make that very clear. But what I am in support of is the abolition of the prohibition of marijuana. And the reason I make that distinctive is very, very clear -- for four reasons why I think we all should.

One, we need to remember and recognize the racist past that comes with marijuana prohibition. In the early 1930s, the first Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, Harry Anslinger, used race as the main means in order to bring about prohibition. Here's a quote from what was then considered the DEA. "There are 100,000 total marijuana smokers in the U.S., and most are Negroes, Hispanics, Filipinos, and entertainers. Their satanic music, jazz and swing, result from marijuana use. This marijuana causes white women to seek sexual relations with Negroes, entertainers, and others."

Another thing he said, "Reefer makes darkies think they're as good as white men."

We know where that went -- further went to the war on drugs with the Nixon Administration, the southern strategy; then to Ronald Reagan.

So from the very start, we must remember the war on drugs has always been, and always will be, a war on black people.

Second, restoration. We must restore the folks who have been destroyed by the war on drugs. It would be a shame if we go and legalize marijuana and make hundreds of white millionaires after decades of making of hundreds of thousands of poor black felons. So we must have automatic expungement, and we must look at resentencing for those who are currently in.

And there must be reparations attached; reparations through taxation. The community must receive some benefit of this tax revenue. You can't go and destroy communities socially and economically, and then try to put a bill on the table and say, "Let's wait to do the social justice." That is not social justice. These revenue streams can help support many of the things like drug treatment, job programs, etc., etc.

Third is regulation. We are all concerned about our kids; and we should be. And many of the stats, despite where you are on the issue, are very terrifying. But we can regulate it. Right now, you don't know what's in the stuff our young people are getting. And I personally-- Back in the day I lost plenty of friends who got a bad bag of something, and they never recovered.

And lastly, we want to make very clear that there is currently no bill on the table that we support; because no bill, currently, takes care of the racial justice issues. And so until that happens, we are adamantly against every bill that is there.

And as my good friend Richard Smith from the NAACP often says, "Don't use the black community as a poster child for why this should be legalized, but when the legalization comes then we want it to say do it in

a separate bill.” Do it all together, end the drug war, and end the criminalization of black people now.

Thank you very much. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Pastor.

Reverend Jones.

REVEREND JONES: Good morning.

I want to thank Senator Rice and everyone else for allowing me an opportunity to come today.

My name is Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones; I just got married and took on my wife’s last name as well.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: All right.

REVEREND JONES: So just for the record, I wanted to update that.

We are in church-- Oh, I just wanted to garner a little support with the-- (laughter)

I also have copies of my statement, because to stay within the time limit I might have to speak a little faster than I would normally. So I’ll give that to the panel as soon as I’m done.

For pastors like myself this is, literally, the busiest time of the year. Today is the Tuesday of Holy Week and, as such, our church is busy preparing for all of the events towards the end of the week -- the climax of the Christian liturgical calendar. And as such, when I saw the hearing was scheduled during the day, during this week, there was a slight temptation to allow our friends and colleagues -- like Reverend Boyer, who feels as passionate as I do about this issue -- to come and testify. But after a brief period of reflection, I realized that I would be doing a disservice to both my

faith and my people if I put the machinations of ministry program preparation at a higher priority than the work of ministry itself. For if I claim to be a follower of a poor Nazarene man who died at the hands of state-sponsored terrorism, a victim of ancient near-eastern mass incarceration and trumped-up charges, then I must follow this Jesus into the kinds of conversations that can proclaim good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoners, freedom and economic renewal to communities that have been ravaged by governmental systems of oppression. So this call brings me directly to the fight for marijuana legalization.

I have to be honest -- this was not an issue that I thought I'd become so passionate and vocal about when I first arrived in New Jersey two years ago. But as I've been here and have gotten more and more acclimated to my city and my state, I realize that the horror of mass incarceration needs to be addressed as quickly and from as many angles as possible. Legalizing marijuana, I believe, can go a long way towards repairing the harm that has been caused to communities of color by the so-called *war on drugs*.

And so I agree with Reverend Boyer that it is paramount that a bill comes before the State Legislature that not only legalizes marijuana, but one that does so in a manner that brings about justice to the communities that have been decimated.

It pains me that we continue to have laws that ban and demonize a substance that was originated on bias. Historically speaking, marijuana wasn't banned because of its harmful effects on people or the damage it was causing to the communities; but it was criminalized as a way of demonizing those who were primarily associated with it -- which, for the

most part, included people of color and those from lower socioeconomic stations. Yet we continue to treat these laws as gospel.

These laws were put as a kind of dog whistle -- a fear mongering form of politics that we have seen now so abundantly on the national stage, yet we still treat these laws like the gospel.

These antiquated laws not only were based on bias, but have been enforced with bias, as people of color are three times more likely to be arrested for marijuana use and possession than white folks, even though the groups use the substance at about the same rate. Yet we continue to treat these laws as gospel.

Research is clear that marijuana, recreationally or medicinally, is not a gateway drug; it is not the cause of harm for adults, light years less harmful than tobacco and alcohol -- substances that we dare not have community forums for. Yet we still treat these laws as gospel.

There is an industry developing, and state and national sentiment is such that it does not take much political expertise to see that we are on the road towards marijuana legalization. Yet instead of unifying to help shape a bill that will help our communities, we are still debating over whether or not we want to support legalization in the first place -- looking at these laws that have devastated our communities and, again, treating them like the gospel.

And so, it behooves me -- I can't stand, especially on this Holy Week, when we commemorate and remember when the heart of the Gospel was formed on the cross of Calvary, to allow anything other than *the* Gospel to be treated like the Gospel. That which causes harm must be named as such.

And I have to again admit that I've been hurt by some of the arguments, for both continuing with the policies as they currently exist. Some arguments that I have heard are based on false information, scaring people into believing marijuana to be a substance that the research simply does not dictate. Some arguments are based on the manipulation of narrative in such a way that the story of a community's current pain is used as justification for maintaining the current system, when it's the current system that is the source of their pain.

And I have been offended by slightly veiled paternalistic arguments that pathologize the black community. Arguments that suggest "we can't handle marijuana legalization;" and that if it becomes legal, then we just won't know what to do with ourselves. And as they say in the church, the Devil is, indeed, a liar. How dare we act as if a people who have overcome and continue to overcome so much "can't handle" legalization? The damage to our community has not come from people "smoking too much weed" any more so than sagging pants is a sign of moral decline. Our problem has been policies that have caused harm and oppressed our people.

Jesus said this, as I close. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." And I suggest that people of faith can't afford to be quiet and stand idly by as fear-birtherd policies continue to harm communities; and we can't afford to be quiet in the formation of a legalization policy that could potentially avoid including our own entrepreneurs and tax money for our communities. No one -- let me very clear -- no one is suggesting that legalizing marijuana is the panacea for all of mass incarceration. Of course, we still need to have training to avoid the ways that people of color are policed. Of

course there is continued work that needs to be done, but legalizing marijuana is a step in the right direction; is a piece of a much larger puzzle.

And I would suggest that the situation is much too dire to settle for decriminalization -- a step that I would have to imagine that is well-intentioned, but one that would lead to, I believe, more problems in our community. We can readily recognize the ways that our justice system is unfair to people of color and poor communities. We have already seen how justice is distributed in an uneven manner. And if possession of marijuana was decriminalized, it would lead to fines instead of jail time; but still a measure of bondage for our people. Who do we think would end up with the majority of the tickets for marijuana possession, despite similar use across different ethnicities? Who do we think would end up having to spend more money to try to pay those fines? Who do we think will end up with warrants and arrests as a result of not paying those fines? Decriminalization, in my estimation, will lead to yet another financial reward system for the government based on the backs of those at the bottom of the ladder.

Decriminalization also does not regulate the product that communities receive; it does not help keep marijuana away from children; and it certainly does nothing to generate jobs and revenue for the people who have been hurt the most by these policies.

We have a chance, I believe, to help rebuild that which has been broken. And so it is up to us to settle for nothing less than a bill that will both end a cruel injustice against our communities, and that will help bring back resources to help repair the damage that has been caused.

And so it is my hope and prayer that you will do the work necessary on our behalf to see that this is the kind of bill that comes before our State Legislature. My hope continues to remain in the fact that in the shadow of a cross, a symbol of suffering, shame, and government-based terror, that the hope of the empty tomb will help us imagine life where resurrection is possible.

Respectfully submitted, Reverend Timothy Levi Adkins-Jones,  
Senior Pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, in Newark, New Jersey.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Pastor Jones.

And if you would leave your testimony with us.

Reverend Boyer, do you have written testimony also, for the record?

REVEREND BOYER: I will write it and send it to you.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; thank you very much.

And certainly, just -- I would hope that those of us who are of a color, and particularly who have been impacted so many years by the unjust systems that we live in -- that we continue to do further research. And I think that as younger generations than I am -- is that we have struggled to make sure we get good academic knowledge and we do a lot of research now. We also know when data is disputed we need to slow down until we get the right data.

And once again, I have a little problem having conversations -- debating some of this data and this issue with folks. But I really appreciate you coming out with the testimony.

REVEREND ADKINS-JONES: Thank you.

REVEREND BOYER: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Next, I'm going to ask Dr. Kevin Sabet to come up.

And while he's coming up, I also want to ask Morgan Thompson to come up, and Mike Smeraglia, because they have to leave. I'm going to give this to the Assemblyman; he's going to make some acknowledgements.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Sure.

Thank you, Senator.

Councilman Sam Bishop from Roselle is also with us today; as well as Council Bill Gallman, and also Council President Manny Grova from the City of Elizabeth.

We also have Reverend Adair from Second Macedonia Church here; and Reverend Bartley who has also joined us, with former Mayor Wayne Smith from Irvington.

I know that the Senator has to go shortly.

SENATOR SCUTARI: Yes, thank you.

Just one moment; just to say thank you, again, for indulging me, Mr. Chairman, for a few minutes.

The one thing I want you to all know is that what I am committed to do is making the very best bill that we can. This bill that I've written is not set in stone; we're still continuing to take in information; information that is given to me by these legislators, as well as stakeholders, will be considered for changes in the bill to make the very best bill possible. But we cannot let the *perfect* stop us from getting something done. But we're certainly open-minded to that.

So, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Senator; travel safely.

**KEVIN SABET, Ph.D.:** Could you stay for a couple of minutes?

SENATOR RICE: Doctor Sabet.

DR. SABET: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Yes; please put your name on the record.

DR. SABET: Thanks; it's Kevin Sabet.

I'm sorry that Senator Scutari has to leave.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Kevin, if you could use that mike.

DR. SABET: I thought he brought up some very interesting points.

My name is Dr. Kevin Sabet; I'm the former Senior Advisor to this nation's first American African President, Barack Obama, where I wrote President Obama's drug control strategy and recalibrated this country's efforts, away from law enforcement and criminalization towards public health. So I think a lot that's been said today is very valid, and we need to keep that in mind.

I'm currently a Professor at Yale University; as well as the President of SAM, Smart Approaches to Marijuana, which I co-founded with former Congressman Patrick Kennedy.

I've heard a lot of what was said today, and I think that we do need to correct the record on a few things.

We're acting under a false dichotomy that the only way we can deal with marijuana is two ways: One, legalization, which we heard a lot of

passion about earlier; and I appreciate that passion, even though I may disagree with it. And on the other side, criminalization and the war on drugs -- as if there are only two ways to deal with marijuana and to fix the wrongs that were rightfully pointed out this morning.

I agree with what was stated about some of the racist history of our marijuana laws; and we absolutely need to fix those things. But to compare -- and I'm going to go off my script a little bit, but submit to the record my written testimony, but I think so much was stated this morning that needs to be discussed -- to be able to compare what George Washington was growing to 99 percent THC dabs that are being consumed by not just young people, but people of all ages, is really an affront to American history. There was no such thing as marijuana with THC more than 3 percent. During Woodstock days -- which I don't think anybody here was old enough to be there; no, Reverend, you weren't (laughter).

REVEREND BOYER: (off mike) Yes--

DR. SABET: Come on now.

REVEREND BOYER: --I went to college in the 1960s.  
(laughter)

DR. SABET: Come on now. All right; there you go.

In Woodstock days, average marijuana was 6 percent THC. Today, the average that we're seizing is about 15 percent; but in legalized states, it is about 30 to 40 percent, mainly because the edibles, and the dabs, and the cookies, and the candies -- things that drug dealers do not produce. These are things produced by so-called *regulated license retailers*. And they're produced by those retailers because, folks, let's be very clear

what this whole thing is about. It's about one thing and one thing only, and that's money; that is money. It's about profit.

And if legislators want to say it's not about profit, and if the people in this room want to say it's not about profit, I hope you will take a pledge now not to receive any money from the marijuana industry, nor benefit from the marijuana industry if it is legal.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE: (off mike)  
(Indiscernible).

DR. SABET: And I'm glad to hear a lot of people agreeing with that.

The issue of alcohol prohibition is a false equivalence. Alcohol has been used by 80 percent of Western civilization since before the Old Testament; that's old. That's -- ancient Greece. Marijuana has been used for a long time too; thousands of years. But not by 80 percent of the West; by about less than 3 percent.

We're stuck with this drug, alcohol. How has it been for us? Where are the liquor stores located in the state? Are they located in Morristown, or in the nice suburbs? Where are the grocery stores located? Where can you get some fresh broccoli? And I'm talking about the real broccoli; not pot. Where can you get cigarettes and play the Lotto? If they have been -- if we have had tax revenue from these items -- and we want to make sure we don't clap or we're going to violate the rules here--

SENATOR RICE: Yes, keep the *ooms* down too; the *ooms* are like clapping to me. (laughter)

DR. SABET: Yes, that's right.

SENATOR RICE: I have to keep the record clear; I have transcription over here (indicates).

DR. SABET: Clapping is an *oom*; that's right.

But where has that tax revenue gone, folks? We've had legal alcohol for 80 years. Do we have free alcohol treatment on demand? Do we have schools funded the way they should be? Do people in this room actually think that you are going to benefit from another legalized drug? We don't have it for tobacco, we don't have it for alcohol; and by the way, we don't have it for this other industry out there that's ruining lives -- the legal opioid industry, which has special interests lobbies funded by their profits. If you think for a minute that we're not going to have -- or don't already have -- the special interest lobby, lobbying for their own profits, then you don't understand the basic economics of business and the economics of an addictive product.

Twenty percent of Americans consume 80 percent of all alcohol in this country. That's 80 percent of the revenue. That means if you're in the alcohol business, you need alcoholics to survive. The marijuana business would be no different. It's the minority-- I'm not saying the majority of people are going to go use heroin who try marijuana, or the majority of them are going to be addicted. We can agree they're not going to be. But in this business you have to focus on those people who are using it often, and you have to encourage heavy use. That's not good for public health.

What about the black market? We really think that drug dealers are going to get licenses, pay taxes? Some might; but we know in Colorado --and we're going to hear later from a police chief from Colorado,

a former one, that the black market, the underground market, is thriving in legal states. You undercut the legal price, you don't play by the rules, and the demand for marijuana and the reputation has gone sky high -- you benefit from that demand. You benefit from the government saying, "This is great."

We also know that the contamination is a huge issue. There are no EPA standards. This is a drug that's against Federal law. That means if the Attorney General wakes up on the wrong side of the bed tomorrow and decides to prosecute -- well within the law to do so. And for states to put their Federal money at risk, and to think that the EPA is going to regulate contaminants is naïve. Already thousands of products -- in fact, let me tell you, hundreds of thousands of individual, wrapped, legal products in Colorado have been recalled because of contamination. So the contamination issue does not just end with legalization. We're promised all of these things; we're promised tax revenue, we're promised social justice.

And I do want to talk about social justice for a minute. I was part of President Obama's Task Force for Criminal Justice Reform. We strongly agree on the abolition of mandatory minimum sentences, and we strongly disagree with the analogy of the war on drugs, like many in this room do. However, what we have seen in Colorado for social justice has been abysmal. First of all, if you look at who's being arrested in Colorado, you would have thought there would be fewer blacks and Hispanics arrested. Actually, the rate of young black and Hispanic youth being arrested for marijuana possession has gone up in that state since legalization. It has not gone down; it has gone down among whites -- 8 percent. It's gone up among blacks 29 percent and Hispanics 58 percent.

It is still illegal if you're under 21 to use; it is still illegal to use it outside; it is still illegal to use it in public housing; it is still illegal to use it anywhere public. But if you can use it in Grandma's basement, she doesn't mind -- maybe you can get away with it. Unfortunately, that by itself, is disproportionate in terms of its policy.

The rate of DUI arrests has gone up, and they also, disproportionately, have been minority arrests.

And where are the pot shops in Denver? They are overwhelmingly in low-income communities in the northern part of -- northeastern part of Denver, which is African American; and the western part of Denver, which are the largely Hispanic communities. That's where they are located.

The white folks in a lot of the other communities have banned marijuana. They were fine to vote for it, but they don't want it in their community, and they have the political power to keep it out of their community.

The issue, unfortunately, has fallen disproportionately in social justice.

And then the final thing I want to talk about is where does this end. Because all of the arguments used about drug dealers, tax revenue, regulation, contaminates -- they all can be applied to other drugs. Do we really think that the legalization movement ends with a drug like marijuana? A drug that really anybody can grow in their own backyard? It's very easy to grow, very easy to smuggle. Different than a drug like cocaine that needs processing; different than drugs like heroin that need processing from opium. These same arguments will cannon -- mark my

words, in the next 10 to 20 years, will be used to legalize other drugs as well. Because if you believe that a drug dealer can go away with regulation if they deal with pot, you have to also be able to use that argument for every other drug itself.

We should reform laws; we need to have expungement; we support the bill on the table about decriminalization. You want to talk about open-air drug markets -- that's exactly what you have when you have a legalized market with advertising, marketing, commercialization, and special interest groups; which is exactly what happens under legalization.

Finally, where does this end, in terms of the workplace? We know that in places like Colorado they have a hard time hiring people who can pass a drug test. The construction industry is having a very difficult time hiring in-state folks. We know that employers will drug test even more. By the way, who is that going to fall on in a social justice way? If you have a rich uncle who can get you a job at his real estate company, you'll probably be okay, because he's not going to drug test you. But if you're in one of the hundreds of thousands of other jobs, that are a lot of low-skilled jobs, you will be tested and there will be ramifications that will fall under disproportionate -- will have a disproportionate impact.

So I ask all of you on the Committee -- thank you for inviting me. I'm going to submit the written testimony. But I think we need to slow this train down because the only people who benefit from how quickly this conversation has slid to legalization are the people who stand to profit and make money. And I guarantee you most of them, but not all of them, are not in this room right now.

Thank you so much. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: No, no, no, no, nope, nope, nope. (laughter)  
Thank you, Doctor.

Ms. Morgan Thompson.

**MORGAN THOMPSON:** Hello; my name is--

SENATOR RICE: Identify yourself, and your organization, or whatever.

And what we're going to do is ask Dr. Sabet to, maybe, just sit over there (indicates) and have Mike come up to sit next to you to testify.

MS. THOMPSON: Am I good? Okay.

SENATOR RICE: Yes; go ahead.

MS. THOMPSON: Morgan Thompson; I'm with Prevention Links. I'm also here as a young person in long-term recovery.

So what being in long-term recovery means for me is that I've been free from alcohol and other drug abuse since 2009, after experiencing a severe substance use disorder through my teenage years that began with marijuana and ended at opiates.

I'd just like to say I'm not here to tell you that marijuana is a gateway drug; but I don't think we can overlook the abundant research that shows that when youth as young as 11, 12, 13 years old are using a drug like marijuana, or any other drug or alcohol, they're much more vulnerable to developing a substance use disorder later in life.

I'm also the Director of Academic and Recovery Support Services for Prevention Links and the Raymond Lesniak Experience Strength and Hope Recovery High School. This is a school for youth who have struggled with addictions, and who are seeking a drug- and alcohol-free

lifestyle in an educational institution where they can pursue their education in a supportive environment.

Each day at the Recovery High School I work with teens from this community whose marijuana use has been the single greatest barrier to their success. Their early, frequent, and prolonged use has prevented them from performing academically and, in some cases, has led to drug dealing and gang involvement in order to support their habits. I can tell you that all of them report that their attitude about the dangers of marijuana was influenced by hearing about legalization in other states and the possibility of legalization here in New Jersey. I can also tell you that very few students who struggle with a marijuana use disorder make it to Recovery High School, or even receive treatment. Most marijuana-addicted youth, instead, end up involved in the justice system, or do not receive services until their disorder has evolved to a much more dire state.

Most of the individuals who are being revived from an opiate overdose with naloxone today were using marijuana in high school. I entered high school as a near-daily marijuana user. I left high school experimenting with opiates and cocaine; and by the time I entered college I was physically dependent and dropped out of school after two weeks. I tried to attend community college and failed out, too far gone in the depths of my addiction. I was very lucky that, when I reached a point at which I was willing to receive help of some kind, my parents were incredibly supportive and had excellent insurance that enabled me to receive all the treatment services I required. Not all families are so lucky.

I have been drug- and alcohol-free since I was 18 years old, and I have been able to pursue a life of meaning and fulfillment in recovery. But my story, sadly, is the exception and not the norm.

It's important to know that I'm not here before you with nearly nine years clean, stably employed, and finishing a master's program because I am strong, or smart, or special. I had several years of therapeutic and recovery support, access to education and employment, stable housing, financial support from my family, and so much more to make my recovery possible. I have made it my mission to do everything in my power to make those same resources available to every young person struggling with addiction. But I can tell you, that is a very challenging mission because the resources simply aren't there in sufficient numbers.

Legalization of recreational marijuana will mean that more children are using drugs earlier. Some of them will grow out of it, never use other drugs, and never become addicted. But a percentage of them will; and the more youth who are using marijuana, the higher that number will equate to.

In an already resource-scarce field, are we ready to invest the necessary funding and infrastructure into providing adequate prevention, treatment, and recovery support services to address that need? My guess is that we will plan to; and then, like we've seen with other legalized substances like alcohol and tobacco, we'll find that the societal costs far outweigh the actual revenue generated. And like other states that have legalized are seeing, we'll be stuck with another generation of drug-dependent young adults with insufficient resources to treat their health condition.

There is little that legalization can accomplish that cannot be done through properly implemented decriminalization. If we do opt to go that route, we will not have to contend with the force of a multi-billion dollar industry that will benefit no one but its leaders, while our young people's views are warped by aggressive marketing campaigns designed to make them a lifetime customer.

Thank you for your time. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Nope.

**MIKE SMERAGLIA:** Nope.

SENATOR RICE: Nope.

MR. SMERAGLIA: Not even me? I'm her Dad. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: No; that's okay. I'm sorry, dad.

MR. SMERAGLIA: All right, all right; fair enough.

My name is Mike Smeraglia. In addition to being Morgan's dad, I'm a husband, a father of four, and a citizen.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: You need to hold your microphone.

MR. SMERAGLIA: Is that a little better? Okay; great.

So my name is Mike Smeraglia; and I feel well-equipped to be part of this conversation, as I have had the good fortune to be born and experienced childhood as a resident not too far from here, on Niles Street.

I am also proud to say that I'm the father of Morgan Thompson with Prevention Links who, on daily basis, inspires me to be a better man.

I can also speak from a position of experience regarding addiction. I spent the first 20 years of my adult life as what many would

consider a *socially acceptable alcoholic*. I had a wonderful wife, four amazing children, and a very successful career. That success allowed me to trivialize my dependency on alcohol and how it affected my decision making, as well as the people around me.

The loss of my mother to cancer was an awakening; a realization that, up to that point, I was very good at expressing my love for my family, but capable of so much more as a parent in setting the right example and effectively communicating with them. It was then I decided to relinquish the addiction that had prevented me from being the best version of me. Without alcohol, my brain was able to function as God meant it to, and I made a commitment to pursue excellence and happiness for me, those around me, and anyone I encountered. Clarity has provided me the tools to do so.

A funny thing happens when you have clarity. It becomes easier to recognize when those around you are dealing with the challenges of dependency. It's easy to see how someone uses food, or alcohol, drugs and other dependencies as a way to numb themselves from life, not seeing the toll it takes on them and their loved ones.

We can't allow ourselves to be naïve and numb to the impact the legalization of marijuana would have on our communities.

The legalization of marijuana is not a complicated issue. For centuries it's been documented where white males in power have used their power in government and business to suppress Native Americans, people of color, and other minorities. The facts expose the truth of legalization. Businesses thrive while families are torn apart.

The risks associated with legalized marijuana are validated by the number of individuals affected as the results of cannabis use. I would like to share data from the Study on the Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado that reflect the ramifications of doing so.

In an effort to not sound redundant -- as you will be hearing from many speakers -- I focused on three areas, the first of which is the effect of impaired driving.

Marijuana-related traffic deaths in Colorado increased 48 percent in three years, between 2013 and 2015. Marijuana-related traffic deaths increased 72 percent, from 71 to 115, after legalization. Marijuana-related traffic deaths involving operators testing positive for marijuana, in 2009, represented 10 percent of all traffic fatalities and increased to 21 percent in 2015. Marijuana kills people.

Hidden costs of marijuana use: Increase in hospital visits, where a diagnosis related to cannabis was identified, increased from 545 to 2,042 between 2009 and 2014. The percentage of cannabis subjects admitted as inpatients from the emergency department increased from 9 percent to 15.3 percent. Emergency charges unable to be collected increased 192 percent. Penrose-Saint Francis Hospital in Colorado Springs reported a loss of \$20 million in uncollected charges.

Marijuana usage among youths: Youths' past marijuana usage increased 20 percent in two years. During the same time, nationally it went down 4 percent.

Colorado youth ranked number one in the nation for use -- past use. Past use from 2013 and 2014 was 74 percent higher than the national average, compared to 39 percent two years earlier.

Teenage admissions for marijuana addiction in Colorado increased 66 percent between 2011 and 2014.

Marijuana is the number one reason adolescents seek substance-abuse treatment in the United States.

Denver Health Clinic youths in treatment consist of 73.6 percent males, with an average age of 15.8 years.

I'm wrapping up, sir. I'll just -- I'll finish up.

More than any other segment of our population, the debate is about how the legalization of marijuana would impact our children. At what point do we stop failing them? At what point do we accept our responsibility as parents?

Decriminalization, along with a commitment to reinvestment in our communities most affected, is the true path to ensuring our children are provided an opportunity to achieve their goals. A focus on educating our children about the power they possess when utilizing their minds to make good decisions -- good decisions that lead to a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem; self-esteem that leads to confidence and an attitude that anything is possible.

I have been very fortunate in my life. As a child of Italian immigrants who came to America and made roots in Elizabeth, I was able to see, firsthand, the challenges we face. It was all because of their love and the support of the surrounding community that I was able to thrive. For me, and those like me, it's our obligation to do all that we can to teach our future generations.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much for your testimony.  
Leave written copies, if we don't have them, with us.

Next we're going to call up Luke Niforatos, Chief of Staff of SAM; and also Corinne LaMarca (indicating pronunciation). Is that correct?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: And while they're coming up, I want to also ask the speakers behind them -- it's going to be Safer -- if I pronounce these names wrong, please correct them on the record -- Quraishi, the Administrator of the NAACP. Is that person here?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: He's here somewhere.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. Is (indiscernible)--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: (Indiscernible).

SENATOR RICE: Is he here -- or she? (no response)

Okay; so that's good. They're not here; that will help us get through this.

Okay; go ahead. I don't know who wants to go first. Just give your name for the record.

**C O R I N N E L a M A R C A G A S P E R:** Thank you, esteemed members of the New Jersey Black Caucus and elected officials.

I'm here today with SAM; my name is Corinne. And here is my testimony.

Being a victim is something I never thought would happen to me. But a lot of people seem to forget who the real victim is in my situation -- it was my incredible daughter, Jennifer, who had so much to

give this world before it was all snatched away from her in the blink of an eye.

If you could take one thing away from me speaking here today it would be this: If this could happen to our family, it can happen to yours.

We did everything possible to protect our daughter from the dangers that exist in this world. We tried to keep her safe; but we couldn't protect her from this crash and this drug that impacts our world so negatively.

Becoming an activist was not something I could envision myself doing; but now it is my life. I do this for others so that they may never know the never-ending pain that I suffer every day, and so does our family.

Let me tell you a little bit about my daughter's story and how she lost her life so tragically July 24, 2012.

Jennifer had just graduated with honors from college. She was recruited her from high school as a lacrosse player to Notre Dame College. She had matured into the most beautiful woman, inside and out, during her high school education and college education. She was so looking forward to a career in fighting drugs, as she had already witnessed the scourge of drugs around her. You see, during her college education, she had participated in an internship with the High Intensity Drug Trafficking of Ohio and realized this was something she wanted her degree to be. So she majored in Intelligence and Analysis Research so that she could fight illicit drugs. She was fluent in both Spanish and Arabic, as required by her curriculum. She had received a certificate after her internship for making outstanding contributions to the program, that actually changed the program today. And she had just had a meeting with them about hiring her back.

Everything she did, she did with all of her might.

In the meantime, she had accepted a job out of her field, as a district manager for a large international company that made her an unbelievable offer she just couldn't refuse. She knew she'd have better negotiating power if she had some management experience first.

After only being in the position a few weeks, she was awoken one night about 12:30 a.m. -- a call from one of the managers from the stores she was overseeing. The manager asked her if she could please come into the store because there was an alarm going off. Without questioning, Jennifer threw on her clothes, hopped in her brand new work car, and made her way to the location.

As she went through an intersection on a green light, she was suddenly and violently impacted on her passenger side by a man speeding 82 miles an hour through a red light, sending her car out of control through the corner landscaping and through the front of a Lube Stop building, taking out the center beam, collapsing the building on her, and killing my most beloved and precious daughter. This man who killed her was high on marijuana.

You can just imagine how horrific it was for our family to receive this call at 6:00 a.m. to inform us that our most beloved daughter, the center of our lives, was so horrifically killed the evening before. She was on the verge of an incredible life, helping others and fulfilling her dreams that she had worked so hard to achieve.

The police assured us that this man would be punished to the fullest extent of the law. But to our dismay, he ended up only getting a mere 15 months in jail. He was coddled and protected, while we were

treated like the perpetrators and shown little sympathy in the justice system. The judge announced at the sentencing -- after my victim's speech - - that he felt equal compassion for both families. How dare he make such a statement, and give this law breaking, drug abusing, and previous OVI-convicted man so much sympathy?

This is just a sampling of what is to come. Big marijuana has filled our heads with lies and made it seem like pot is a benign substance. This is a hoax as seen in other states that have already opened their doors to recreational marijuana.

When I think of our country and the problems we already have, it's clear to me, and any rational person, that throwing marijuana out there in the mix would only make matters worse. Drugs have been at the crux of so many of the murders we hear about each night on the news. There are already synthetic drugs for what people claim marijuana would do, such as Marinol, that have been FDA-tested and can be prescribed by a doctor to do a much better job for the patient who needs pain relief or appetite stimulate.

In states that have legalized it, it's a joke as to how to apply for the card, which is virtually given to anyone.

Please do not pass this law if you care anything about the people in your state. You will experience, as reflected in states like Colorado and other states, an increase in crime and prostitution, car crashes, inflated insurance payments, medical issues, and death from suicide from uses of this drug as they become helplessly addicted. I have friends who have gone through this.

I think about what happened to my innocent daughter whose life was ended by the effects of driving impaired on pot. Many pot smokers think they actually drive better while impaired. Marijuana is a gateway drug, and we don't need more youth headed down that road. Please stop this madness before we lose any more of our precious and vulnerable youth. Protect the health and safety of all Americans, and don't let big business push you around.

Please don't be short-sighted. Our future depends on you.

Thank you for inviting me here today and letting me speak.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much for taking the time and coming from out-of-state to give your testimony.

MS. LaMARCA GASPER: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: We really appreciate it.

Luke; just be cautious of the time, okay?

Thank you.

**LUKE D. NIFORATOS:** Absolutely.

Thank you, Senator Rice, and members of the Caucus, and all the members of various representatives -- Senate, and House, and elsewhere here in New Jersey who attended today. I think it's a testament to the representation of leadership in this state that they are so interested in the voice of the people. So I am really grateful for opportunities like this to speak.

I'm here today -- I'm the Chief of Staff and Senior Policy Advisor at SAM -- Smart Approaches to Marijuana, from the D.C. area.

But I'm really here today as a former Colorado resident; I spent almost my entire life in Colorado. I'm here today as the husband to a

wonderful wife and as the father to of a beautiful 17-month-old daughter. And we moved from Colorado just about five months ago; and so today I'm going to speak a little bit about what we were told in Colorado, what we experienced as a family with a young child, and, really, kind of, what's going on in Colorado.

I can tell you that we moved out of Colorado because big marijuana moved in. This massive, commercialized industry that is making billions of dollars now across the country, but especially in Colorado, has showered Colorado with billboards and advertisements for pot edibles and high THC products such as candies and ice creams. They've used Sesame Street characters to promote their products; they've used all sorts of things that are clearly, kind of, targeted at younger audiences. And that's been something that's been very concerning for a number of people, and obviously myself as a father.

We've also seen that this industry seems to know no limits. There are members of the local press and media in Colorado that have gone to work for this industry now, and are putting out pro-marijuana articles almost every day. And that's something that I think really adds a lot more emphasis to an event like this because I was in Colorado and I was trying to speak with others about my experience and tell people, "No; what's going on in Colorado is not good." But how can one person, or a few people, contend with a multi-billion dollar industry that is advertising every day to tell people that everything is fine? So it is so important that communities get a voice in this issue.

We were promised that the revenue from marijuana -- for marijuana legalization -- was going to take care of our kids and our schools.

We were promised that it's going to be good for public health; that there would be no impact on the children; that it would be safe and regulated is what we were promised. And we've heard a lot of that today in some of the testimony.

First of all, I'd like to start with-- In Colorado, over 70 percent of our towns and cities have banned recreational marijuana use because it is not going well, and these towns do not want it in their neighborhoods and in their communities. And so now think about -- there's a portion of 30 percent of the state that has marijuana recreation allowed. And in that 30 percent, there are 1,014 pot shops versus, almost, 600 Starbucks and McDonald's combined. So we have a massive inundation of this industry; it is completely out of control.

Some of the public health effects that we've seen -- we've seen, first of all, Colorado is the number one state in the nation for youth and young adults first-time marijuana use; a 65 percent increase in the year since legalization. We've also seen the annual rate of marijuana-related emergency room visits increase 35 percent since legalization. We've also seen that calls to poison control centers have risen 210 percent since legalization. And a lot of these folks who are involved in these admissions and in these results are young children and adolescents. And that's been something that's been, obviously, very concerning.

We've also seen, in terms of -- we get into the whole budget discussion and, okay, our schools are going to be taken care of. Well, the Superintendent of, actually, the school district where I went to high school, in Colorado -- the number one school district in the state, Cherry Creek schools -- their Superintendent came out and said, "We haven't seen a cent

of the money from marijuana taxes.” I have parents reaching out to me every day and asking, “Why we aren’t getting increased funding for our schools?” and I haven’t seen anything of it. So I think that is an important perspective to note.

We also had our *Denver Post*, as well as the *Colorado Independent*, both report, in recent years, that pot taxes have not solved our Colorado budgetary problems. They have not filled the hole; in fact, it’s a fraction of the problems that we have financially. So these have not contributed to solving our problems, from a revenue perspective.

We’ve also seen, with the black market-- So oftentimes you hear, “Oh, if we just legalize it, it’s going to get rid of the black market.” Well, in Colorado -- there was actually a recent article that just came out that said Colorado is now the black market hub of the United States of America. And I have to tell you, as somebody from Colorado, I am so ashamed that is what we are being known for. And so, actually, our Attorney General recently said, “The criminals are still selling on the black market; we have plenty of cartel activity in Colorado and plenty of illegal activity that has not decreased at all.” Emphasis -- *not decreased at all*. And that’s from our Attorney General, Cynthia Coffman.

We’ve also seen that packages are being sent in the mail with marijuana in them; that there is an increase of over 20 percent of people doing that from Colorado, and it’s probably even more. And we’re also seeing that illegal grows are just multiplying exponentially. I mean, we just had a seizure in Aspen -- \$6.5 million worth, with over 9,200 illegal marijuana plants. In fact, police are reaching out to local representatives in Colorado saying, “We don’t have the resources to contend with these grows.

We can't even incinerate them, so please don't report on them because otherwise we're going to be caught kind of in a crunch." So that's, lately, coming out of Colorado.

From a drunk driving perspective -- and I can't speak to it anymore personally and beautifully than Corinne did -- but to speak to it from the Colorado perspective, fatalities, as a result of marijuana-related drugged driving, have doubled since legalization in Colorado. In fact, just yesterday, the Colorado Department of Transportation just announced a hearing that they're doing because it's so bad they want to hear from members of the community on what they should do about this drugged driving problem. Yesterday -- that was out in the news in Colorado.

We've also seen marijuana-related traffic deaths increase 66 percent. So, you know, again when you have this industry that has so much money, it's overcoming any narrative of the truth. They obviously want to sell; they want people to purchase their products. That's the way business works. It's drowning out the narrative and the truth of what's actually going on here in Colorado.

You know, Kevin spoke to you a little bit earlier about the fact that our employers aren't finding people who can pass a drug test; and that's just an issue we're continuing to contend with in Colorado for low-skilled labor. People can't pass a drug test; they have THC in their system.

So I want to close with a story for really what motivates me to work on this issue and the reason why I'm here -- and that is actually for my daughter and my wife. So we were walking in our neighborhood in Denver where we lived. And my daughter, Shiloh, was in her stroller, and we were going out for a walk. And as we were walking, a cloud of marijuana smoke

covered us and got into the stroller; and clearly, my daughter was breathing it as she was sleeping. And my wife looked at me and she said, "I cannot believe we cannot walk around in our own neighborhood and get away from the smoke of marijuana, clearly doing damage to our daughter and to our own lungs. What could this possibly be doing to us?"

And I looked at her, and I said, "We have to do something about it."

And so that's why I'm here today; because I believe families should not have children who face these issues of second-hand smoke. I believe families should not be bereft of their children on the roads and drugged driving fatalities. I believe that we should see these astronomical rises in emergency room visits and poison control calls. And I believe that a multi-billion dollar industry intent on driving a profit from addiction -- because addiction is the most profitable thing for this industry -- we cannot allow that to thrive.

And so I urge you -- as members of the New Jersey Legislature and in the various leadership positions that you have -- to please put the interests of your people first, and I know that you do.

Thank you very much for your time today.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you also for your testimony. If you can leave copies with us, we appreciate it.

We're going to try to keep moving, and moving fast. I know there are other speakers, and I want to thank you for your patience.

Next, I want to call up Bishop James, Jethro James; and along with Bishop James I also want to call up -- if they're here -- Regina Bracey,

Director of New Jersey Parents' Caucus of Passaic County; and Jaleel Terrell, Youth Caucus Member of New Jersey Parents' Caucus.

Are they here?

**SAFEER QURAIISHI:** I thought I was going next.

**SENATOR RICE:** Oh, I'm sorry. What's your name?

**MR. QURAIISHI:** Safeer Quraishi, with the NAACP New Jersey.

**SENATOR RICE:** Yes, come on up.

Okay; I asked if you were here; I didn't see your hand go up. Okay.

And next on deck, behind them-- Pastor, you can stay; we'll let him testify first, Pastor, then-- Okay.

**MR. QURAIISHI:** Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today -- before you today.

My name is Safeer Quraishi; I'm the Administrative Director for the NAACP, New Jersey State Conference.

I bring you greetings from our 41 branches in 21 counties of this great state; and our State Conference President, Richard Smith.

Simply put, the legalization of marijuana is a Civil Rights issue. African Americans-- We've heard already today African Americans are nearly three times more likely to be arrested for possession in New Jersey than their white counterparts -- and aside from the fact that the usage rates are essentially the same.

The NAACP's stand in support of legalization of marijuana stems from one of our founding principles: We seek to eliminate racial prejudice wherever it may be, where we see it. If members of our own

community and our elected officials are able to see that this is not just a drug issue, but a Civil Rights issue, I believe even more of individuals across this great State of New Jersey will agree that it's time to legalize, tax, and regulate marijuana.

I do want to make it abundantly clear that the NAACP is not encouraging marijuana use. We know that marijuana is not healthy for some people, but our current system is giving too much access to young people. We need to move marijuana dealers off of the corners, and put them behind counters where this can be regulated and watched after.

New Jersey's war on marijuana has been a failure. In its path we'll find long-term exclusions for anyone who has been an offender -- that they may face potential consequences including up to six months in jail; the loss of your job or driving privileges; a criminal record which we know can stigmatize an individual for life; exorbitant fines and fees; and arrest warrants for fees that may not be paid. And the most important thing I'll circle back to is a stigmatization forever on an individual who has been convicted.

Across this country we have 2.6 million people behind bars; and 4.8 million -- that's more than half of the people in the State of New Jersey who are in jail. And a large portion of that comes from marijuana prohibition.

This extraordinary phenomenon has opened the eyes of many across this state and our country, and has made the majority agree that legalizing, taxing, and regulating marijuana is an important piece of fixing our state and country's addiction to using the criminal justice system to deal with our problems. In 2010 alone, we spent -- the government spent

\$127 million on criminal justice costs enforcing marijuana possession laws. Imagine what we could have done with \$127 million.

Legalization, taxation, and regulation of marijuana for adults is the right choice for this state. In addition to the cost savings, ending prohibition, so too would the state bring in tax revenue in a taxed and regulated system that you would not get with decriminalization.

The NAACP supports this approach, but will keep a watchful eye on these resources to ensure that if they -- New Jersey moves forward to legalize and tax marijuana -- and I'm confident that it will -- that there's a reinvestment in the communities that have been devastated by the war on drugs.

Legalization must include components that have addressed these harms. Marijuana legalization needs to be fair and it needs to be equitable. There must be investment in the communities for creation of jobs, job training programs, funding a broken education system, a commitment to public safety, drug prevention and drug treatment programs. We know that well-resourced, evidence-based educational programs are the solution to the drug problems we experience today. It must include policies that provide automatic and retroactive expungement, access to the industry for individuals with prior convictions and those from different socioeconomic backgrounds, the creation of civil penalties for those who operate outside the legal market, and reinvestment of the revenue generated into those communities harmed most by marijuana prohibition.

Without these elements, a piece of legislation would just further perpetuate our state's racial disparities and would do nothing to

help the communities of color that have suffered under the racist policy of marijuana prohibition.

We are confident that with your leadership we will have a bill that addresses and repairs the decades of harm inflicted on communities of color.

To be clear, as Reverend Boyer said earlier, our community will not be the poster child as to why this legalization needs to occur, but when the revenue comes around we are ignored and moved to the side. We must move towards a safe, legal, regulated marijuana system; but we must do it in the right way.

This change has the potential to create thousands of sustainable, well-paying jobs in agriculture, manufacturing, health and safety, retail, and other sectors. These opportunities must not only become available to those with significant capital or major investors. We must make sure that employment and small business opportunities become available to all communities, especially those disproportionately impacted by enforcement of our marijuana laws.

Let me just wrap up.

So for the few years, today, and moving forward, NAACP has worked and will work diligently as a part of this effort to educate New Jerseyans about how the status quo has failed our communities, especially black communities. New Jersey must legalize, tax, and regulate marijuana to end the harms caused by our current laws, create jobs, increase public safety, and generate revenue that will help all New Jerseyans.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

Let me just say, right quickly -- as a member of the NAACP I was very much concerned at the national level, and then at the local level, by the position taken when we talk about social justice and Civil Rights. But the one thing that the Legislative Black Caucus members have learned, through our life experiences and academic experiences, is to follow the money. And we look at who supports a lot of this stuff that we get involved with -- we're part of coalitions, and that's what happened with bail reform. And the Black Caucus said that we support bail reform, but it's being done wrong; it's not going to help us the way it should.

Now, today they're saying it doesn't help us and we have to fix it. And sometimes black folks and people who are brown need to take leadership roles and have coalitions come behind us I think that's important. When you follow the money, with the George Soros and people like that -- when I look at some of our Civil Rights organizations and the ACLU and see the kind of money that's flowing out there to promulgate--

**BISHOP JETHRO C. JAMES, Jr.:** That's right.

**SENATOR RICE:** --good intentions, if you will; but beyond what it does -- to do harm to our community, I get very much concerned.

So we always say, follow the money.

Bishop James.

**REVEREND JAMES:** Thank you.

Thank you, sir.

You're here -- that's NAACP. And I have to say it -- Richard and I take different issue on this. I'm shocked at the NAACP; but then I'm

probably one of the oldest persons in here. I walked with Martin King; I was with Malcolm, as a teenager. So what you are all reading about, I lived.

I'm the President-- I'm Bishop Jethro James; I'm President of the Newark-North Jersey Committee of Black Churchmen, as well as the Senior Pastor of the Paradise Baptist Church. I am also a licensed social worker; I'm on the Board of St. Michael's Hospital in Newark. As a Bishop, I'm responsible for all social action for all Full Gospel Baptist Churches in the State of New Jersey, along with being a Chaplain for the New Jersey State Police; one of the survivors of 9/11, ground zero. And so I've been in the game a long time.

I've come to warn you about the dangers of trying to pass legislation that makes empty promises. Number one, I was fortunate enough to receive an education and work in the corporate world, along with Senator Rice. I retired from PSE&G as an urban development executive after 38 years of service, which allows me to get a great pension and have some other things. However, everyone on the community certainly won't be able to do that because we know the first thing that marijuana will do is devastate communities of color. They will not be employable anywhere. (applause)

He said no clapping, no clapping. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: I had to grab the mike from Senator Rice; no clapping.

BISHOP JAMES: Amen, amen.

They will not be able to be employed anywhere.

We know that those who seek employment will never work, number one, for the State of New Jersey, that is trying to pass it. They

won't be driving buses, won't be on trains. They will not be in law enforcement. They cannot teach school in the State of New Jersey, because they cannot pass a drug test. They will not work in the Transit system; they will not work in the prison system; however, they will probably be part of the prison system. They will not work at any major corporation, because they cannot pass a drug test.

In the State of New Jersey, you cannot work for Home Depot, you cannot work for Lowe's because you are driving heavy equipment. You will not have employment.

If unemployment is 5 percent in Parsippany, it's 15 percent in Newark and Paterson. The reality is, it will devastate the best and the brightest in our community.

I've come by to let you know this morning that our young people will become heavy users, if not already, of marijuana. It's tragic. People who are saying you train children -- children do what children do. That's why you tell them, "Don't stick a plug--" or something in an electric socket, because children will always do what children always do. It robs them of their family life because they're getting high; it robs them of their education because they won't stay in school; it robs them-- We're talking about legalizing a substance that, at best, will put the brightest and the best of our community in a situation where they will never be employed in any major situation, therefore devastating them and causing them to do other things with the rest of their lives.

The legalization approach will keep our people -- you say, out of jail; but the majority of kids in states that have legalized marijuana find out that 55 percent of African Americans in Denver -- children from the age

11 to 16 -- are arrested because now they come through a juvenile system first. The reality is that the African American community -- these 11- to 16-year-olds -- because they possess something in cannabis. In the Hispanic community, it's a 34 percent increase in Colorado. It did go down 8 percent in the Caucasian community; I wonder why.

Colorado puts its shops predominantly-- We did the geo mapping in African American and poor communities. In some cases, there are more pot shops around than there are McDonald's, as well as Starbucks, in Denver itself.

I'm certain that when we look at what's going on in health care-- Just recently, we tried to compare alcohol and tobacco. There was a trillion-dollar push to get everyone hooked on tobacco. Now there's a billion-dollar push to get everybody off of tobacco.

This became a multi-billion dollar industry. The American Medical Association, in its recent Journal, has already talked about what cannabis will do to your heart and your lungs. We know what tobacco will do; and cannabis, because of its component, is made up of things that will hurt us three times faster. But now we want you to stop smoking.

There's a thing out that says that there's a test case that women who are in their first trimester of pregnancy -- that marijuana will stop you from having morning sickness. It doesn't tell you what's going to happen to your fetus. And if you continue to smoke it, you will find out that it will be in your breast milk. These are medical facts. No one wants to talk about this, and so the damage is being done to us in the very womb.

But where will it be? I sit on the Board of Saint Michael's Hospital. I'm deeply concerned, when one weekend we had 29 young

people come in, and they were just shot out. Well, somebody said it wasn't legal cannabis; that legal cannabis-- Well, how do we know? Because we're seeing what's happening in the black market. We know that there are children-- If we have a glass of wine, or a glass of beer, it was stated, or some other hard liquor -- if we're drinking it, it only impacts our organs. But if we're smoking it, and there's a young child in the room, he or she, who is trying to develop their brain, develop their lungs, develop their insides, is now taking this in.

We're seeing between -- in Colorado, since they wanted to quote that -- emergency run poison incidents in children, in babies from 0 to 8 years old, a 70 percent increase in poisoning. Let me say this: There is no EpiPen for marijuana, like there is for peanuts. The reality is that we're seeing things already-- Numerous towns have banned marijuana shops. Let's talk about the counties that have banned marijuana shops. Put it in the hood and let the ghetto have it and kill their children, kill their opportunity, give their chances for a jobs? Let's put it where we need to say it. The government itself -- Governor Murphy himself -- his county has banned marijuana. So the Governor can't come out and even buy him a joint if he wants one. (applause)

That's reality; that's reality.

SENATOR RICE: No clapping, no clapping.

BISHOP JAMES: And so passing these ordinances in towns-- Once again, they want to put it in the African American neighborhoods. And to some of my young colleagues who talk about -- there's going to be money. Nobody is talking about-- The Bible states this, "No man goeth to war or builds a house without counting the costs." If it's an all-cash

industry, who's going to pay the bean counters to collect that? Where are you going to keep the cash? It's only going to increase problems in our own community.

And so the reality of legalizing marijuana -- it's going to devastate the African American community. We need to think long and hard, and long and hard, and long and hard -- what it's going to do to our community.

Dr. Martin Luther King stated this, as I close. "You can pass laws on lynching, but it doesn't stop them from hanging me (*sic*)." And that's what you're trying to do. You're trying to hang something on the African American community.

And once again, as I close, to have someone who doesn't look like me -- to quote George Washington, when George Washington owned slaves; when the fathers of this country -- we weren't people. Don't treat us -- we're people now.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR RICE: Okay; thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Ah, ah, ah, ah. This is not Sunday; this is today.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Tuesday. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Okay; all righty.

Next, I'm going to ask -- we're getting through this -- we're going to have enforcement; we're going to definitely have some medical people up.

Is Regina here; and Jaleel Terrell?

Jaleel?

**J A L E E L T E R R E L L:** (off mike) Jaleel's here.

**SENATOR RICE:** Okay. And Regina's not here? (no response) Okay; is Pamela Capaci here?

**P A M E L A C A P A C I:** (off mike) Yes.

**SENATOR RICE:** Come on up -- from Prevention Links; Hope Sheds Light.

**MR. TERRELL:** Can you hear me?

**ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER:** Yes.

**MR. TERRELL:** Good morning.

My name is Jaleel Terrell. I'm a Policy Advocate for the New Jersey Parents' Caucus. I'm also an MPA student at Kean University, soon to graduate with honors in December. I'm also a Youth Partnership Consultant with the Annie E. Casey Foundation out of Baltimore, Maryland; and I'm also a resident of Elizabeth.

I come to you because I'm also a youth who has been affected by marijuana prohibition.

First, I want to thank the Chairman, and the members of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus, for considering testimony on this critical issue that has affected numerous New Jerseyans.

The New Jersey Parents' Caucus supports marijuana legalization. My organization is dedicated to working with legislators, community members, and other stakeholders to make sure New Jersey's future system of regulating marijuana is not harmful, but rather beneficial for all New Jerseyans.

New Jersey's current system of prohibiting marijuana is regressive, costly, and ineffective. New Jersey arrests more than 24,000 people a year for marijuana possession at a cost of \$140 million to New Jersey taxpayers. This absurd and wasteful policy criminalizes otherwise law-abiding people and wastes resources that would be better spent on projects that support our families and communities.

A conviction for marijuana possession can have severe long-term consequences. The resulting criminal record subjects a person to a system of legal discrimination that can last a lifetime, and can make it difficult or impossible to secure employment, housing, student loans, or even a driver's license.

For example, I want to share my own experience with catching a marijuana possession charge in New Jersey.

My sophomore year in college I was charged with possession of marijuana for smoking down the street from my house. Because I was -- I had difficulty at the time with my academics. I was told that I would serve one year of probation for this, and I was told this would not affect my record. That was a lie. Every time I try to apply for a job with the government -- whether it be a State or local position -- I am told that I have a criminal record, so they cannot hire me.

In the same vein, I graduated with honors from Kean University as a double major in English, Writing, and Criminal Justice, with a minor concentration in Sociology in 2015. And I am soon to graduate again, with honors, from Kean University with a Master's in Public Administration.

This stain on my record is not allowing me to get a job with government, even though I am a citizen who has a passion for serving the public.

Overall, the marijuana laws in New Jersey have a disproportionate impact on minorities. African Americans and Latinos are three times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession than whites, even though both use marijuana at the same rates. The solution to addressing the harms of marijuana prohibition is to legalize, tax, and regulate marijuana for adult use. Nine states -- Alaska, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and the District of Columbia -- have now legalized marijuana.

Due to this new marijuana legislation, these states have stimulated their respective economies with the creation of new jobs, and generated millions of dollars in tax revenues without negative consequences. These states have also seen a large drop in arrests for marijuana, and thus fewer people labeled as *criminals* simply because they use marijuana.

These are examples of the social good that stems from marijuana legalization.

Colorado distributed \$230 million to the Colorado Department of Education, between 2015 and 2017, to fund school construction, early literacy, bullying prevention, and behavioral health.

Oregon allocates 40 percent of their marijuana tax revenue to its state school fund, depositing \$34 million into the fund so far. The state also distributes 20 percent to alcohol and drug treatment.

Nevada's 15 percent wholesale tax is projected to bring in \$56 million over the next two years to fund state schools.

Washington dedicates 25 percent to substance use disorder treatment, education, and prevention. The state also distributes 55 percent of its marijuana tax revenues to fund basic health plans.

Alaska will collect an estimated \$12 million annually, which will fund drug treatment and community residential centers.

California and Massachusetts will invest a share of their marijuana tax revenues in the communities most adversely impacted by drug arrests and incarceration, particularly low-income communities of color, to help repair the harms of unequal drug law enforcement.

These are some examples of marijuana arrest rates dropping.

The total number of low-level marijuana court filings in Washington state fell by 98 percent between 2011 and 2015.

The total number of marijuana-related court filings in Colorado declined by 81 percent between 2012 and 2015; and marijuana possession charges dropped by 88 percent.

In Washington D.C., marijuana arrests decreased 76 percent from 2013 to 2016, with possession arrests falling by 98.6 percent.

In Oregon, the number of marijuana arrests declined by 96 percent from 2013 to 2016.

In Alaska, the number of marijuana arrests for possession, sales, and manufacturing declined by 93 percent from 2013 to 2015. Youth marijuana use is stable.

This is a chance for New Jersey to capitalize on a vigorous opportunity to help stimulate our economies as we continually struggle with social and fiscal problems, such as our pension and opioid crisis. Tax revenue from marijuana sales can help with those issues.

Also, a September 2017 Quinnipiac poll found that 59 percent of New Jersey voters support legalizing marijuana. This is consistent with the growing support for marijuana legalization that we are seeing nationally. Marijuana legalization was approved by a ballot initiative in the first eight states where voters directly made their support for legalization heard--

SENATOR RICE: You need to wrap.

MR. TERRELL: Huh?

SENATOR RICE: End up; finish up.

Go ahead; you need to wrap up here.

MR. TERRELL: Oh, yes -- as well as the District of Columbia.

Creating a controlled system focused on taxing and regulating marijuana will create social and economic benefits for all New Jerseyans. Legalizing marijuana will create new jobs and generate millions of dollars in tax revenue to fund projects to better help all New Jersey residents. No longer will law-abiding citizens be labeled as *criminals*. This will have an impact on racial disparities and harms, because minority arrests for this egregious law will be reduced.

Resources that are currently wasted on marijuana prohibition will be allocated towards projects that support our health and communities. This is the time for New Jersey to be liberal and not be conservative with this issue, because the proper marijuana legislation can help mitigate both social and fiscal issues in New Jersey. This would be the right thing to do for New Jerseyans as we struggle to find revenues to fund both our health and social programs.

It is imperative that marijuana legalization legislation include provisions ensuring that it creates a fair and equitable marijuana market

and repairs the harms that have disproportionately impacted my community, as well as other communities of color, for generations in New Jersey. Marijuana legalization must address these historical disparities and ensure fairness and equity moving forward. We cannot just allow individuals to come to our state and profit from a legalized market. The jobs generated from this new legislation must reflect the diversity of our great state.

Fair and equitable reform must include the following policies:

Protections for those who apply for a license or employment in the industry who have prior arrests and/or convictions; access to the industry for individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds; requirement that the State shall actively seek to achieve a diverse industry; provisions intended to repair communities most harmed by marijuana prohibition, including expungement and investment of revenue generated into communities; and civil penalties for marijuana activities that occur outside the new legal system to avoid the continuation of a criminal system that disproportionately harms communities of color.

These are the components needed to ensure that New Jersey creates a fair and equitable system that benefits all New Jerseyans.

The New Jersey Parents' Caucus supports marijuana legislation with the proper provisions that will repair harms that have disproportionately impacted communities of color, by creating a fair marijuana market.

Thank you for your time, and I hope you consider these provisions, as they will be the first step in repairing the harms done to communities of colors.

Thank you once again for your time and consideration.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, too, young man.

Let me just say this to you.

The Parents' Caucus, I suspect, has a lot of young parents in it, too. And given your academic background, I think that's good. And the one thing you want to do -- and this is for the young people -- is to make sure that when you do the research, weigh the good and the bad. And we have to look at what you call the *true cost-benefits analysis*. And so although the dollars and stuff look good, and some of the things that dollars are going to do look good, there are some other impacts that need to be put into the overall picture. And you need to be aware of that now, so I want a record to create all sides of the debate.

And as someone who's insulted when people say, "Well, it's a social justice issue;" if it's a social justice issue, then we can address social justice without legalization. And we can make sure that people come out of prison, and their records are expunged, and all those kinds of things, if that's what it is -- if it's not about money. If it's about both, then people need to say that.

But sometimes you look at the money -- the money does more harm than good to communities, particularly communities of color. And I can document that, and other people can document that.

So I just want to give you some food for thought, because I hear you loud and clearly -- that your life was kind of stymied, if you will, after you did all the right things, because of that record. And we agree; that should be addressed. And that's why I say there are different ways of doing it.

And so I just want to be clear on the record, because we're not getting all the information as to the true cost-benefits analysis of it.

The other insulting thing -- and I'll then let Ms. Capaci speak -- is that what I'm hearing from those who are promulgating this -- all the things we've asked for over the years, as legislators -- treatment for our community, jobs, opportunities, better quality of life, better quality of education -- we can never get. But when people want to promulgate these types of things to make money, they use us to do it. And what they tell us is that, "Whatever you want, we'll give you. So we'll give you treatment money now, but to give you treatment money, we're going to create more addicts in your community." That doesn't make any sense; that's a big contradiction. Or, "We know you shouldn't be in jail, because there are three times more black folks in jail than white folks. So we want to turn you loose. But we will only turn you loose if you legalize marijuana so we can make some money." But you can turn me loose without doing that.

And I'm not saying which side is right or wrong; but things have to be put in this common-sense perspective. And the subliminal messages to us need to be heard and evaluated.

So I just wanted to give you food for thought, because I love to see young people changing things for us. And I want to make sure we're thinking more objectively and start to lead. And other folks are putting coalitions together, and make us a part of it, with one-sided information.

But thank you very much.

Do you have a copy -- a written testimony with you, Jaleel?

MR. TERRELL: Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Leave it with us, okay?

Ms. Capaci.

We're running out of time, so we're going to have to-- Let me just ask some questions, right quickly.

I want them on deck: Rory Wells; Marco Vasquez, retired police officer; Chief John J. Zebrowski. If you're here, you'll be coming up next. And then we're going to bring up some of our medical people and psychiatric people to give us some testimony about mental health, etc.

Okay; go ahead, Ms. Capaci.

MS. CAPACI: Good morning; I think it's still morning.

SENATOR RICE: And excuse me; by the way, we did this wrongly. Because when we started off this morning, we should have had Reverend Britt give us prayer. I know God is blessing us anyway, because you're doing real good, okay? (laughter) But I also should have had him say some words before; and he's still here.

So Reverend Britt, if you want to say a word now, you can. If not, when we close, we assume we're going to--

**R E V E R E N D G E O R G E E. B R I T T:** (off mike) When we close.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; thank you, Reverend. We apologize - - okay? -- for protocol.

REVEREND BRITT: No problem.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; Ms. Capaci.

MS. CAPACI: Good morning.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this morning.

My name is Pam Capaci; I'm the CEO of Prevention Links. Prevention Links is a local community-based organization. We've been

located in Union County for 45 years or more, at this point, providing comprehensive substance abuse prevention services, education to area schools and families, family support, youth development and, more recently, recovery support services.

We have a reputation of working very collaboratively across all aisles, and in every community in this county and beyond.

I'm proud to call Assemblyman Holley, in particular, a friend, and someone I respect, and who I believe respects me as well. And I want to thank him and the panel for the opportunity to speak today.

Ironically, I was, just this morning, in a municipal courtroom with a community member who reached out to our office for support. Sometimes I'll do that; I'll go to court with people who cannot afford attorneys just to speak on their behalf; to lend support. I'm a poor substitute for an attorney, but yet I still sometimes have a positive influence on the outcome.

The reality-- I was stressing; I was trying to get here, I was there, I was torn. But I realized, quickly, why I was there in the morning, beyond helping that individual. The reality of the disproportionate minority contact in our court systems and judicial system was clear and visible this morning. I won't get into those details, but I'll just say that it was a humble reminder. And I believe fully that the efforts to mitigate this sort of injustice should be applauded and supported at every level.

But the question here today is, how do we do that? And after 30 years of working in this field myself I can say with full confidence that addiction does not discriminate, okay? It's a public health crisis and there is no magic bullet that's going to resolve this issue.

I believe the solutions lie in a multi-faceted strategy that's going to require time, and research, and a really intimate understanding of our state, our communities, and the many diverse communities that we have across the State of New Jersey. And we can learn lessons from other states, but we really have to do our work here in New Jersey.

I can also say, with full confidence, and on the foundation of a lot of the statistics and a lot of the comments that we've heard today, that if we move forward, we need to do so with an abundance of caution. There are so many hidden, and now often-revealed, unintended negative health, and justice consequences, and disparities that can arise if we move too quickly with this issue.

I believe we need to seek solutions along a full continuum of remedies, some more imperative than others. By that, I do believe we can take some steps to alleviate some of the more egregious inequities that currently exist.

But while we take those first steps together, I think we also need to build a plan that includes the remedies that were mentioned here today, but also that we earmark the funds that are going to support that plan. We can't just have a package of ideas and legislation that talks about programing if we aren't also going to earmark and direct the funds that we'll need to support those programs.

There are so many issues today that are polarizing us. I'm proud of my friendship with Assemblyman Holley, in particular, because we don't always see eye-to-eye on this issue. And this topic -- we have very long and healthy discussions. They include-- And they're thoughtful, and

they include every element regarding how do we move forward, should we move forward, when should we move forward; all of that. And I believe that today you have the opportunity to bring our voice back to Trenton, back to our lawmakers, back to our Governor; and that message needs to be, we have to slow down, and we have to look at this issue from all sides and choose a path that works for New Jersey.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, also, very much, for both of your testimonies. If you have written testimony, if you would leave it with us, we'd appreciate it.

I'm going to ask, now, the folks I have on board -- Rory Wells, and Marco Vasquez, and Chief Zebrowski -- to come up and take a seat here.

And next, after that, we want to bring up -- and we're going to bring up-- After that, we're going to bring up Peter Brown, the Councilman of Linden; and former Mayor Wayne Smith; and also Ms. Diane Litterer. And after that, we're going to bring up Dr. Melissa Tassé, Dr. Calvin Chatlos, and Dr. Kristine De Jesus.

Assemblywoman Quijano just came in.

How are you doing, Assemblywoman?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN QUIJANO: My apologies; but I had court all day--

SENATOR RICE: That's okay.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN QUIJANO: --and rushed over.

SENATOR RICE: As long as it wasn't any marijuana violations (indiscernible). (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN QUIJANO: Not yet; not in my court right now. Not today; it's traffic. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Just give your name, for the record; and try to be as summary as you can because a lot has been said and try not to be repetitive, if you can. I know your testimony is sort of different -- it's the law enforcement side, and we need to get that for the record. And once -- whoever speaks first, once you finish speaking, just kind of shift and do a musical chairs and let the next person come and take that, for the record, okay?

Thank you.

**RORY JOSEPH WELLS, Esq.:** Thank you Chairman; thank you to the Caucus and to our hosts.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Can you hold that microphone?

MR. WELLS: This one here?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: No, no; the other one on the table.

MR. WELLS: Okay.

Thank you to our hosts.

My name is Rory Wells; I'm a former Ocean County Prosecutor -- Assistant Prosecutor in Ocean County. I also was Liaison; I instructed hundreds of officers through the Ocean County Police Academy over the last decade. In addition, I did extensive community relations work with the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office and throughout the state.

Currently, I am a private attorney with the GoldmanWells Legal Group.

Let me just get right into it.

It's important to deal with the facts when discussing an issue that will change the fabric of our communities, and have an impact on generations of young people and families to come. One example of this would be retail establishments selling to young people even though it is against the law. In Washington state, for example, of 424 violations among licensed marijuana businesses, 288 violations pertained to selling marijuana to minors, and 136 violations were for allowing minors access to a restricted area. That's from the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board.

One argument I would like to address from pro-legalization advocates is the mischaracterization of how much money will be saved regarding marijuana offense arrests. They present this argument in such a way, stating, "We can take all that money and put it to better use." This gives a false impression that there will no longer be marijuana arrests, or that there are no offsetting costs. Of course we know there will continue to be law enforcement actions and regulation for underage use, illegal sales, and driving while under the influence.

Regarding drugged driving: Drugged driving and motor vehicle fatalities have increased in states that have legalized recreational marijuana. According to a 2014 report by the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, or FARS, about 50 percent of fatal crashes nationally involved drivers whose blood tests were positive for THC.

As the debate moves forward, I believe most of our citizens, when given objective scientific data, will reject the commercialization of these products in our state. Legalizing and commercializing marijuana in New Jersey runs contrary to our goal of a healthy, successful environment to

raise our children. You cannot put more drugs into our communities and expect its use to decrease.

Common sense tells us, as with any business, the marijuana commercial industry -- from suppliers, to packaging, to retail sales -- will desire a growing, permanent consumer base for them to make money.

As a former Prosecutor and an African American, I too am concerned about the social justice aspect of this issue. I believe further study into the disproportionate arrest rate, with specific short-term and long-term goals, should be established to help solve this problem. I also believe that less use and abuse of marijuana should be one of those goals, not more. There is no reason to rush this process under the guise of social justice when we are not sure it would even accomplish our goals.

There are two critical notes I'd like to point out.

Colorado marijuana arrests for young African American and Hispanic youth have increased since legalization. That's from the Colorado Department of Public Safety, 2016. And regarding Washington D.C. -- they saw public consumption and distribution arrests nearly triple between the years 2015 and 2016. A disproportionate number of those marijuana-related arrests occurred among African Americans. That's from the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department, 2016.

As a former Assistant Prosecutor, I would also like to briefly address the issue of home grows.

This aspect of marijuana policy, if implemented, would simply be impossible to police. For example, if the limit was set at six plants per home, without a doubt nearly everyone who grows this plant would grow more than the limit. Inevitably, home grows would be sold and shared

amongst neighbors and friends, young and old, increasing unregulated black-market distribution. The very same day that law goes into effect -- setting an arbitrary limit -- is the same day that law is ignored on a widespread scale, and the additional creation of multiple massive home grows will continue.

The black market aspect is a very serious consideration regarding this policy. The ability to hide black market activity in legalized states has encouraged drug trafficking organizations and Mexican cartels to begin growing marijuana illegally within the United States, and there is now a strong presence of cartel activity in Alaska, for example.

I believe we can afford to be patient with an issue of this level of importance. There is no reason to rush this legislation through when other states that legalized are continuing to struggle with issues, such as expansion of cartel influence, increased youth usage, and its effect on other drugs and alcohol abuse.

Just one other point regarding-- There's often a common refrain from pro-legalization folks that marijuana has never killed anyone. And just as a Prosecutor and somebody in the community, I think it does a disservice to those-- We heard testimony from someone earlier -- of someone who was abusing the drug got high and struck and killed somebody or was doing something that took a life. I think it minimizes that when you say, "Marijuana never killed anyone." We know abuse of that drug, and any drug, can cause loss of life and consequences. So I just wanted to point that out.

I have submitted my testimony. If I can be of any future help to the Caucus, it would be my pleasure.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: I appreciate it.

Why don't you change chairs--

MR. WELLS: Yes, sir.

SENATOR RICE: You can stay there; you're good.

MR. WELLS: Okay.

SENATOR RICE: We have to get them over here.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Yes. (laughter)

SENATOR RICE: Okay; you can testify next.

And I'm going to ask Mayor Wayne Smith and Councilman Brown to give me the privilege of the Chair to make them third, after another group, because I know we have some flights to catch. So after these two individuals testify, I want to bring up Dr. Melissa Tassé, Dr. Calvin Chatlos, Dr. Kristine DeJesus, and Dr. Edward Latimer, okay? And then we'll bring up Councilman Brown and Wayne Smith; and then we'll get to the last folks on the list -- John Micarelli (phonetic spelling) and Kabili Tayari.

**M A R C O V A S Q U E Z:** Senator Rice and members of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus, thank you for allowing me to talk to you today on this issue.

My name is Marco Vasquez, and I recently celebrated my 43rd year anniversary as a sworn peace officer in Colorado.

Before I get started, let me briefly tell you a little bit about my background.

I spent 33 years on the Denver Police Department, and retired from the Denver PD as a Deputy Chief. I went on to become a Police Chief of two smaller departments in Colorado, Sheridan PD and Erie PD.

In 2010, I was recruited to become the first Chief of Investigations of the newly created Medical Marijuana Division; and I assisted in establishing the regulatory and enforcement framework for over 2,000 Colorado medical marijuana businesses.

After I left MMD and became Chief of Erie PD, I also represented the Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police as the Marijuana Issues Co-Chair, and in that capacity I was able to act as a voice for Colorado law enforcement as we implemented marijuana legalization in Colorado.

I have some experience in the Colorado marijuana legalization experiences, and I have spent, as I said, two years as Chief of Investigations for the Medical Marijuana Enforcement Division. I've sat on a number of working groups and panels representing the Chief's Association of Law Enforcement as we worked to design rules and regulations to help keep our communities safe.

I've testified a number of times before Colorado legislative subcommittees regarding the Chief's Association of Law Enforcement position on marijuana bills.

I have talked to numerous stakeholders including business owners, law enforcement, regulators, and policy makers; and I believe I have a good handle on what has been happening during our social experiment to legalize marijuana in Colorado.

I'm going to give you just kind of a quick overview of what we were told by many legalization proponents prior to the vote to legalize recreational marijuana.

We were told that there would be no major issues. Not true; we've seen many issues around the legalization and commercialization of marijuana.

We were told that crime would go down. Again, not true. One of our greatest challenges is quantifying crime and disorder around marijuana legalization. What Denver and other municipalities have found - - that have allowed commercial businesses -- they found an increase in burglaries of marijuana grow facilities where the suspects are stealing the marijuana plants.

We've seen an increase in violence surrounding marijuana, including marijuana-involved homicides, robberies, and burglaries,

In a *Denver Post* article, in July of 2017, it stated crime rates dropped or remained static in many of the nation's 30 largest cities in 2016. At the same time, Colorado's crime rate per 100,000 people is up 3.4 percent, fueled by an increase in auto thefts, rape, murder, and robbery. Colorado's 2016 crime rate was increasing at 11 times the average of the other 30 major cities. It was stated in that article, "Some Colorado lawmakers, police, and legal experts partly blame the marijuana industry, claiming that it has lured transients and criminals to the state." Representative Cole West stated, "I think it would be naïve to not believe that the increase in drug use is not having an impact on the crime rate."

The Department of Housing and Urban Development reported a 13 percent increase in Colorado's homeless population between 2015 to

2016. Many homeless, who call themselves *the travelers*, have told us that they have come to Colorado because of the marijuana legalization.

In a June 30, 2016, CBS4 news story, Denver Mayor Michael Hancock talked about drugs, specifically marijuana, in response to a high-profile attack on the 16th Street Mall. Mayor Hancock said “Let's be clear. Marijuana is drawing people to the mall. The Travelers are very clear. I can tell you this, because I've talked to the travelers,” said Hancock. “This is one of the results of the legal marijuana industry in Denver, and we're going to have to deal with it.”

The Colorado Bureau of Investigations reported an 8.3 percent increase in property crime, and an 18.6 percent increase in violent crime in 2017.

The National Institutes of Health showed that the density of marijuana dispensaries was linked to an increase in property crimes in nearby areas. Researchers found that in Denver, neighborhoods adjacent to marijuana businesses saw 84 more property crimes each year than neighborhoods without a marijuana shop nearby.

If New Jersey allowed commercial marijuana businesses, it would then open up the potential for increased crime, such as inside job robberies and burglaries, and robberies of the owners leaving with large amounts of cash.

We were told that the black market and cartels would be eliminated. Again, not true. We've seen an increase in black market activity, and we have seen organized crime groups, such as Chinese, Russian, and Cuban organized crime elements in Colorado. I personally do not believe that we will ever eliminate the black or grey markets.

We were told that there would be no diversion. Again, not true. Colorado has seen extensive diversion, both out of state and to our youth. In 2016, Rocky Mountain High, a Colorado drug task force, completed 163 investigations of individuals or organizations involved in illegally selling Colorado marijuana, both in and out of state.

Highway interdiction seizures of Colorado marijuana increased 43 percent in the four-year average, 2013 through 2016, since Colorado legalized recreational marijuana; compared to the four-year average, 2009 to 2012. Highway interdiction seizures of Colorado marijuana increased 20 percent, from 288 in 2013, to 346 in 2016 after recreational marijuana was legalized. Of the 346 highway interdiction seizures in 2016, there were 36 different states destined to receive Colorado marijuana.

We were told that marijuana equals alcohol, and should be regulated like alcohol. Again, not true. Marijuana is an entirely different commodity than alcohol, and my experience and the experience of other regulators has shown that marijuana is much different to regulate.

We were told that impaired driving would not go up. Again, not true; it has gone up. Marijuana-related traffic deaths, where the driver tested positive for marijuana, more than doubled, from 55 deaths in 2013 to 125 deaths in 2016. All traffic deaths in Colorado have increased by 16 percent.

We were told that officers -- and I heard testimony again today -- that officers would be freed up to be able to focus on more serious crimes. Again, not true. My experiences in conversation with many law enforcement executives and officers across Colorado is we're spending much more time in Colorado focusing on marijuana now -- again, because of the

prevalence and the saturation of marijuana in the state and in our communities. We're spending a lot more of our resources and time on marijuana enforcement.

We were told that the marijuana of today equals the marijuana of the past. We've already had testimony around that. The potency that we're dealing with now in Colorado -- some of the dabbing and shatter -- is up in the 99 percentile. And again, we're not dealing with our grandfather's marijuana. It is much more potent.

Over my 40 years in policing, my focus has always been on public safety and how to keep our communities safe. During the course of my career, I spent many years in drug enforcement and I was able to see, firsthand, the adverse impact that substance abuse has on our youth. I've seen a lot of change in the drug use landscape in our communities. Frankly, I've watched what is happening in communities across America, from marijuana legalization to the opioid epidemic, and I am concerned for the future of many of our youth.

I use a simple formula to talk about what is happening. When you increase availability, decrease perception of risk, and increase public acceptance of any commodity, you will see an increase in use; and we certainly are seeing that in Colorado. Once we see that increased use, it is very difficult to keep marijuana out of the hands of our youth.

We know from validated studies that marijuana use for youth under 30 years old, especially chronic use, can have an adverse impact on brain development. We also know that 1 in 6 youth become addicted to marijuana. We have certainly seen that increased use of marijuana in

Colorado, and I believe that we have also increased risk factors for Colorado youth.

New Jersey would likely also see an increase in underage customers hitting up over-21-year-old customers to buy some marijuana for them, similar to what we have seen for decades -- where underage youth hang out at liquor stores, trying to get a legal customer to buy them alcohol. Many Colorado youth obtain their marijuana from family members and friends over 21.

The biggest problem with adding commercial marijuana businesses is we would be increasing -- or New Jersey would be increasing availability of marijuana, because anybody 21 or over could buy marijuana and then sell or give the marijuana away.

Marijuana legalization proponents argue that marijuana is safer than alcohol. Again, this is simply not true. The harms simply manifest themselves differently.

One of the biggest flawed assumptions is that with the legalization of marijuana -- we will see a decrease of alcohol use. In Colorado, we've actually seen an increase of about 8 percent of alcohol use since marijuana has been legalized. I do not believe that alcohol -- or that history will show a decrease in alcohol use; it will show an increase in marijuana use and alcohol use. And we know that the use of marijuana plus alcohol increases the dangers of impairment much more than the use of just marijuana or just alcohol.

As a career law enforcement officer, I would never knowingly support something that I see as counterproductive to community safety. I

believe that adding commercial marijuana businesses in New Jersey is counterproductive to public safety, public health, and New Jersey's youth.

Over the last 40 years, I have seen public safety risks; and I've seen what works and what doesn't work. I was around when the tobacco companies glamorized cigarette use and marketed cigarettes to our youth. I sincerely believe that commercial marijuana legalization will ultimately be the *big tobacco* of the 21st century. I have seen the negative impact on communities because of drug and alcohol abuse; and again, I'm seeing an increase in drug abuse in Colorado.

Thank you for allowing me to talk to you today. When Colorado began our great social experiment of legalizing and commercializing marijuana, we were the first, and we had no roadmap or playbook to follow. New Jersey is lucky in that you can learn from our missteps and mistakes.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much.

The next speaker -- before you speak, I'm going to turn the mike to Assemblyman Holley. He needs to do some recognition and acknowledgements.

Assemblyman.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Sure.

Thank you, Senator.

We have joining us Councilwoman Elsie Foster, who is here; Essex County Registrar Dana Rone, who is also here. And Dana was here earlier, and I neglected to mention her. Dana has been working with us, and has travelled to California and Colorado-- -- and I thought you were

going to speak with the group, Essex County Registrar. I do apologize on that.

And Councilman Dave Brown from the City of Rahway is also here. And you all know my colleague, Annette Quijano.

Do you have the next speakers?

SENATOR RICE: Okay; put your name on the record and your organization, Chief. I appreciate it.

And let me just thank you, Chief, for coming in from Colorado to take your time to come here. I think it is very important that we hear from people who are actually living this and learn from the people who are actually living this.

Thank you very much.

**CHIEF JOHN J. ZEBROWSKI, Esq.:** Good afternoon, Senator; and it is *afternoon* at this point, so I know that we are on the clock.

I want to start by saying thank you, though -- thank you to the Legislative Black Caucus for hosting these forums, particularly today's forum. This type of discourse is absolutely necessary in order to get out as much information as possible on the subject as we possibly can.

And I would also be remiss if I didn't thank Pastor for allowing us to have this opportunity in this wonderful, beautiful church as well.

I am Chief John Zebrowski of the Sayreville Police Department; I'm also the Executive Vice President of the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police. And I am also the Chairman of their working group that is studying this issue right now; and I have the distinct honor to be in front of you today, as well this magnificent group of individuals and their speakers.

I feel humbled to hear the stories that they have, and the education and expertise they have on the subject as well.

The working group that I belong to is comprised of seasoned and learned Chief Executives of law enforcement from around the State of New Jersey, whose purpose is to study the subject, investigate the available research, focus the discussion as it relates to and affects the law enforcement community, and to remain vigilant to the members of the Association.

But more importantly, we are here to provide the necessary support to our individual communities as our lawmakers make an informed decision on this very important issue.

Let me begin by telling you that I do not hold myself up as a clinical expert on the legalization of marijuana. Rather, I am speaking to you as an experienced law enforcement officer with over 30 years of enforcing the laws related to impaired driving, and whose community is a connecting point for many points of interest and major transit hubs, including New York City.

On any given day, the access point of the New Jersey State Parkway from State Highway 9 in my town is crowded with commuters, averaging over 100,000 vehicles per day. We are also the home to such busy highways as the Parkway, State Highways 9 and 35, which run directly through my town, adding another 400,000 travelers per daily commute, morning and evening, and also providing direct access to the New Jersey Turnpike and Route 18. So I feel appropriately qualified to discuss the issues and concerns related to impaired driving and, in this case, drugged driving, and its effect upon the motoring and non-motoring public.

And I'm not alone in this experience. New Jersey has some of the most heavily traveled and congested roadways in the United States. Our efforts to thwart drunk driving have met with a great deal of success, as the incidents of drunk driving and crashes due to drivers impaired by alcohol have been relatively low and stable over the last decade or so.

But drugged driving is not the same as drunk driving; and our collective understanding of the impairments due to drugged driving is limited. As for marijuana, the physiological and metabolic effects from its consumption are more complex from that which comes from consuming an alcoholic beverage.

Let's begin with this point: Marijuana is not a benign drug. Impairment due to drugged driving has certain comparable similarities to impairment due to drunk driving; but it's the differences that make the roadways less safe, and the ability to enforce drugged driving law much more difficult.

Alcohol is unique among impairing drugs in that there is a documented correlation between blood levels and levels of impairment. That doesn't exist for other drugs, and it has been shown to be non-existent for THC in marijuana. Currently it is not possible to identify a valid impairment standard for marijuana, or any other drug equivalent to the 0.08 percent BAC limit for alcohol that we now have in New Jersey.

Although blood-alcohol content can be accurately measured and correlated with behavioral impairment, it is not the case with marijuana, in part because alcohol is water soluble, whereas marijuana is stored in the fat and is metabolized differently, making a direct correlation with behavior difficult to measure. Since THC is fat-soluble, it is quickly

removed from blood as it is soaked up by the brain and other highly perfused fatty tissues in the body.

Exacerbating the problem is the matter of how to best create, implement, and enforce the laws prohibiting impaired driving. This is particularly concerning in New Jersey, the most densely populated state where the risk of catastrophic consequences related to a drugged driving incident is exponentially more probable than in any of the other states that have legalized marijuana to date.

The members of the working group have researched the issue in an effort to better understand how the legalization of recreational marijuana will affect our communities. And that research, thus far, validates our concerns and strengthens our collective resolve that the State of New Jersey should not legalize the use of recreational marijuana. We understand that this research remains formative, as much of it is related to the relatively short period in which marijuana has been legalized in certain states. We feel that it is much better to postpone any decision until independent and comprehensive research has been completed using a better sampling of size and time. But given the statistics that are available today, it is clear and indisputable that the use of recreational marijuana negatively impacts both the motoring, pedestrian, and special needs community; and that innocent people in states where recreational use of marijuana has been legalized are at a greater risk of harm, injury, and death due to the increased numbers of impaired drivers.

Let's look at what we do know.

The percent of traffic deaths related to marijuana doubled in Washington state in the year retail marijuana sales began to be allowed.

In Colorado, marijuana is now involved in more than one of every five deaths on the road.

A recent review of literature on drug-impaired driving found that being under the influence of marijuana nearly doubles the risk of a driver being involved in a motor vehicle crash resulting in death.

Over the first six months of 2017, pedestrian fatalities rose sharply from a year earlier in states that had legalized recreational marijuana.

Combining marijuana with alcohol -- which is the most increased effect -- appears to increase impairment dramatically, beyond the effects of either substance alone.

To this point, it has been a collective and successful effort from law enforcement, legislators, advocates, and our community members making the superhighways, our heavily travelled arteries, and each local roadway safer, with motor vehicle crash rates due to alcohol impaired driving at all-time low levels. This is not time to reverse that course. It is imperative we do not underestimate the adverse impact legalizing recreational marijuana will have on traffic safety within our communities.

I, along with each member of the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police, invite and look forward to forming lasting partnerships for the purposes of better defining this specific issue and providing clarity where there is misunderstanding. We appreciate the opportunities such as this to help frame and focus the discussion on specific concerns. Most importantly, we want to encourage and engage our individual communities into action and in opposition to legalizing the use of recreational marijuana.

In closing, once again I want to say, on behalf of the New Jersey State Association of Chiefs of Police, I appreciate this opportunity and am looking forward to speaking to you in the future on this issue as well.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Chief, thank you very much.

If you can leave a copy of your testimony with us, I'd appreciate it.

The next group that's coming up is Dr. Melissa Tassé, Dr. Calvin Chatlos, Dr. Kristine DeJesus, and Dr. Edward Latimer.

So we'll take it two at a time.

And while you're coming up, let me just say to the Chief that-- Chief, you said something that's important that never got on record. And I said this, and the media said they never thought about it. The demographics of New Jersey are different than those other states we're talking about; I think that's important to note.

And also, when we look at this objectively as legislators, we never use the term *foreseeable*. That's the term that's used in court, and people are found civilly liable or guilty based on what should have been foreseen, based on what we know. And that's an important point also.

I don't know who wants to speak first, but I think we should yield to the lady, if you will. (laughter) Because, first of all, it's still Women's History Month and, you know, that stuff. And there's a big movement going on; I'm not going to be a part of getting stepped on. (laughter)

Okay, Doc.

MELISSA TASSÉ, Ph.D.: Hi.

Thank you for establishing this forum such that all voices can be heard on the debate about legalization of marijuana for recreational purposes in New Jersey.

My name is Melissa Tassé. I am a resident of New Providence, New Jersey, and a very active citizen of the State of New Jersey. I Chair the State Public Affairs Committee for the Junior Leagues of New Jersey; I serve as a Trustee on the boards of both Overlook Medical Center and Newark Academy; and am also a member of the New Providence Musical Alliance.

I hold a Ph.D. in neuropharmacology, and I founded my own private foundation, on whose behalf I am here. It's called The Honey Bee Foundation, whose mission is to educate parents about the developing brain and the risk for developing substance use disorders -- or what we know as *addictions* -- in children and teens.

I also choose to be 100 percent self-funded, because there is simply not enough grant money out there to fund the education and prevention programs so desperately needed in the fight against the opioid epidemic and other substance use disorders.

I have redacted a lot of my testimony, because it was much better articulated by others before me. And I'm going to, because of my background, kind of shift the focus really towards the brain.

As you heard earlier, first-time use of marijuana has gone up significantly in Colorado since it has been legalized; and among children as young as 11. And this is really, really important to think about, because when we're talking about legalizing marijuana, we are talking about legalizing a mind-altering substance -- a substance that affects the brain by impairing cognition, judgement, and reflexes in the still-developing brain of

young adults. So let's get a few facts on the table, as evidence-based background to this discussion.

Number one: Children using any substance are more likely to develop an addiction or substance use disorder. Ninety-four percent of all addictions start during adolescence. The adolescent and teen brain is still in a process of critical development, making it that much more vulnerable to drug use. Regular heavy marijuana use in adolescent and teens has been shown to be associated with an 8-point drop in IQ.

We also know from several studies, including the *Monitoring the Future* study, that heavy marijuana use is also associated with decreased educational outcomes, as well impaired life outcomes. People experience lower grades and exam scores, they are less likely to enroll in college, and they are less likely to graduate from high school or college. They also experience a lower satisfaction with life; more likely to earn lower income, and more likely to be unemployed.

I am baffled as to why, as a society, we would want recreational marijuana to be legalized without first really understanding the science and the data that is coming out of states where it is already legalized. Marijuana is not a benign, harmless substance; it is far from it.

Marijuana lobbyists, representing manufacturers and wealthy investors, are the loudest voice in this debate. I, by no means, am demonizing any voice; but we need to be clear: These are the voices of investors, not that of sound and thoughtful public policy.

And this is where I skip over. (laughter)

How have we not learned our lessons from opioids, alcohol, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and even sugar? These were all introduced as

substances that were believed to be actually good for people, without sufficient data. For all of these, it has taken years to recognize the harm, and to start reversing the health impact and properly educate people. The damage has been done, and it is massive.

Today, we are running the same risk/benefit trade-off issue with e-cigarettes. They are advertised as safer than regular cigarettes without any long-term data to back that claim. They are used mostly in adolescents, although they are not to be sold to non-adults. They are more addictive than cigarettes, creating a lifetime impact on young lives that we choose to justify because it generates incremental tax revenue. As a society, we need to do better than that.

Why in the world would we go down this same path of not properly understanding and vetting the impact this will have? We owe it to ourselves to be educated and informed as to what this will do to our society and, especially, the children in our society.

And, in fact, I don't know of anyone who has mentioned this or if you're aware -- the NIH has a study, the *ABCD Study* -- the *Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study* -- that has just started. Data is coming out; and they will have all the data to tell you the impact of these drugs on childrens' brains.

But if we feel compelled to move forward with legalizing marijuana, then we need to learn from history and be very lucid. First, we should assume that wide-spread consumption is harmful. Until proven otherwise, it would be irresponsible to assume that legalizing marijuana will prove beneficial to society. Basic prudence, as well as past experience,

dictates that we should first minimize potential harm until we know better. We have made huge mistakes in the past; let's learn from them.

All communication should carry a very visible disclaimer -- that marijuana consumption has not been proven to be without significant health risk.

And three, we should define today the potential risks and benefits of legalizing marijuana use from incremental tax revenues, to alcohol consumption drop, to reductions in drug sentencing in targeted populations, to the impact on substance-use disorders. These should be studied extensively by independent academic experts over the next five to eight years so that we can answer much more definitively that this has been a net positive or negative for New Jersey.

Once we have the data, we could confidently modify the risk language about marijuana use, or do a U-turn if it turns out to be of significant negative consequence. But our policy would be fully informed, which is certainly not the case right now.

In conclusion, we are asking to undertake a huge, statewide experiment in condoning the use of substances that affect brain function and have been shown to be harmful in many circumstances. On one side of the ledger is incremental tax revenues; on the other side, we have unanswered questions, absence of data, speculative benefits, and significant incremental healthcare and societal costs. We can feel justified by saying that, "I used pot, or smoked some in college; and it had no effect on me." But let's be honest; we also know people who have used marijuana and have not shown the ability to deal with it at all.

More and more we are in a knowledge-based society, where we should protect and develop young brains. We should not pass any legislation to legalize recreational marijuana. But if we do, it should only be done as part of a massive education campaign about the risks and unanswered questions of marijuana use. Anything short of that would be deeply irresponsible.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much. I appreciate the testimony.

We're pushing time now, and I know people have been waiting to testify. But work with me on it.

Go ahead, Doc.

**E D W A R D L A T I M E R, M.D.:** I'm going to be brief, Senator Rice.

It's a pleasure meeting you; thank you all for having us here today.

I have to believe that you folks have heard a lot of compelling testimony as to why this has to be slowed down. I don't think anybody in this room, and who has testified here before you, has mal-intent; I think people who think pot should be legal have their valid reasons on why it is that they think it should be. Even I think some entrepreneurs don't necessarily have bad intent. I don't think people are trying to take our society apart and trying to harm us.

But the truth is, is that pot is an abused drug; it has an addictive potential; it has withdrawal that goes along with it.

We heard Senator Scutari earlier talk about how people of color and minority communities are saddled with a lot of disproportionate -- the big word, *disproportionate* abuse at the hands of law enforcement. Law enforcement has a lot of laws, and a lot of other laws that can be abused disproportionately as well. And getting rid of pot is not going to solve the problem, okay?

Pot will make kids dumber; it just will. As the good lady next to me said, pot lowers IQ; it interferes with performance, it interferes with the ability to delay gratification, to postpone, to maturity, etc. Kids won't study as well; kids will fall out of school. They'll take money; they'll borrow big bucks to go to school. They'll have weed when they're supposed to be studying. And it will interfere with their development, and it will impact on families and on their wallets, okay?

I've seen-- As a psychiatrist in Montclair for 30 years, I've seen a lot of people really crater with marijuana. The perception that pot is benign is now so pervasive -- it's amazing how people just think it's okay. We hear all the miracles of pot; we hear all the different things that you can rub on your body, from CBD, etc. But I have to tell you, in my own personal experience, I've seen a lot of people go downhill and basically waste futures and delay their abilities to mature until they really stop smoking pot. When the State stamps *legal*, it sends a message: Legal means okay. Just what happened to gambling -- we put *legal* on it; gambling went up.

So what I would encourage you folks today -- if you're going to make a move to try and relax the laws with regard to marijuana, please just start with decriminalization. Make it so that-- The young man who spoke

before about having two degrees in college and he couldn't get a job because of the damn box on his application -- you can get rid of that box, okay? You can make a difference in his life. You can get people out of trouble; you can do that immediately, and you don't have to wait for legalization in order to serve a social justice issue.

I want to thank you very much for this opportunity today. And again, I learned a lot today. I hope that I have served a benefit to you folks as well.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

I have two other Docs coming up.

Yes, come up.

This is Calvin?

**J. CALVIN CHATLOS:** Yes.

SENATOR RICE: Okay; and then we have Doctor Latimer.

**KRISTINE DeJESUS:** DeJesus.

SENATOR RICE: He just finished; and--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: DeJesus.

SENATOR RICE: Oh, Kristine; yes, okay.

Behind that is going to come Councilman Brown and Mayor Wayne Smith; and behind them -- we're on the wrap side -- is going to be John Micarelli, Kabili Tayari; and then we're going to have Dana Rone, Virgil Grant; and then we have three others who will come up; and Reverend Britt.

Okay; what we're going to do is -- we're going to have to bring up Councilman Brown and the Mayor after this, because that's the way I

had them scheduled. Then we're going to skip the schedule and bring up Dana Rone and Virgil Grant; I know Mr. Grant has to take a flight out. Is that right? Okay.

All right; go ahead.

Yes; whoever wants to go first, can go first. But you know, we yield to the ladies. But that's up to you. (laughter) I don't have to tell you now.

DR. DeJESUS: I'm fine.

DR. CHATLOS: She's yielding to me. (laughter)

Senator Rice and Caucus members, thank you for the opportunity allowing me to appear before you with this testimony

First of all, let me introduce myself. I'm Dr. Calvin Chatlos; I'm an Addiction Psychiatrist and Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, and have been working in New Jersey since 1985.

I'm an Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Rutgers University, New Brunswick; but I am not speaking here as a representative of Rutgers University.

I am here with my primary vested interest in having a son, age 20, and a daughter, age 18, who will be living and raising a family in New Jersey and will be influenced by any decisions that this Legislature makes regarding changing laws for marijuana use in this state.

As part of my background -- I was instrumental in providing a review of the recommendations to the New Jersey Legislature for the New Jersey Comprehensive Drug Reform Act of 1987; I was a founding member of the New Jersey Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, which was established as a result of that legislation; and was instrumental in

the establishment of the Municipal Alliance for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, one of the nation's largest community organizational networks for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse in his country.

I've been providing addiction and mental health services to residents of New Jersey for 33 years. And as I have been following recent events in this move toward changing the marijuana-related laws in New Jersey, I'm aware, as you probably also are, of much information and misinformation about effects, beneficial and harmful, of marijuana and cannabis products. I am here today to provide, not my opinion, but scientifically informed evidence about some effects of marijuana.

I have one main point, and that is expressed in information I am providing to assist your Caucus in developing any changes in legislation regarding use of marijuana in New Jersey.

We've heard some testimony about the scientific evidence; I have a group of studies that is entitled, *Marijuana is Not a Harmless Herb*. And this is a packet of information for your use. Many times you hear facts, you hear opinions. These are summaries of the leading studies regarding the harmful and some beneficial effects of marijuana that I would hope that you use in educating people in making this decision.

I assure you that this is not the *reefer madness* of the 1930's and the 1970's propaganda film, or the idea that marijuana use just leads to a descent into madness. People, of course, as someone mentioned earlier, do not die directly from marijuana overdose. An emphasis of this exaggerated danger has been a grave disservice.

We've come a long way since then, and in some venues have come to see marijuana as a wonderfully beneficial medication that treats

many medical problems and illnesses, and should be almost as available as over-the-counter medications that do not require a doctor's prescription. In tempering this discussion, I'd like to highlight some information that I found intensely fascinating; and I don't know if it's been presented previously, and I think we need to know more about marijuana and THC.

The problem is, that we have natural molecules and nerve receptors for marijuana and cannabinoids. We have a natural chemical, just like the opioids, that controls pain; it's called *anandamide*, which means *bliss* in Sanskrit. It's what makes marijuana feel so good.

What's more fascinating, that I think-- We cannot demonize marijuana and cannabinoids because we are learning that every primate has marijuana or cannabinoid receptors; every amphibian, every reptile, fish, and even some of the more primitive animals. Which means cannabinoids, and the natural cannabinoids, are very important; and we don't know why. What we do know -- and the woman mentioned earlier -- is that they seem to be quite important in nervous systems and brain development, and immune and reproductive systems.

I would ask the Caucus -- as I'm going to review some things quickly -- if this were a new medication, even with the very positive effects on illness and disease, would you approve -- would the Legislature approve its non-prescription use with the following potentially harmful effects.

Not everyone is affected harmfully; but what I am going to do is, I am going to relate single sentences of what is some of the information in this. Some of it has been presented; but the reason I'm giving this to you is so that you have some proof to point to. Every one of these facts has more than one study to support it.

Intoxication triggering coronary heart attack events and strokes has been shown.

Acute use increases the risk of traffic injuries, as was mentioned.

Babies of mothers using marijuana have impaired attention, learning, and memory problems, impulsivity, and behavioral problems.

Addiction occurs in 10 percent of users, 17 percent of adolescent users, and 30 percent of daily users.

Daily use is associated with an increased risk of using other illicit drugs, known as the *gateway hypothesis*; and we have wonderful studies from other countries, so it is not just limited to our culture and what's happening in this country.

It doubles the risk of psychosis and schizophrenia, and it increases the risk of earlier onset of psychosis in young people.

Regular use increases depression; lower levels of educational attainment, high school, and college completion, as was mentioned. Earlier use of -- the younger the use, the more the impact, changes to brain structure -- I have some of the studies here for you to look at the summaries -- and an increased risk of every one of these facts occurs as the concentration of THC went from 4 percent in 1995, 13 percent in 2012; and you heard the other person mention, some of the products are up to 98 percent of THC.

It does impair driving; it does lead to increased welfare dependence; unemployment, and lower income, as the other gentlemen mentioned. Again, we have the summaries here for you to point to and show support.

I will leave with -- if this were a new medication, would you approve its non-prescription use with these potentially harmful effects?

The previous doctor mentioned one thing that it is in the last page of this report. The ABCD Study -- Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development Study; a 10-year study, 10,000 children will be followed. There is no necessary reason to hurry this process. I, as others have said, would urge to delay it until we have the information. We will be having the information. And I would also include with this presentation -- I have an e-mail address attached; I would like to offer myself as a resource for any of the scientific information and questions that some of you may have in this discussion.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present before you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much, also, Doc.

Go ahead, young lady; thank you.

DR. DeJESUS: Okay.

Hello my name is Dr. Kristine DeJesus, and I am the owner of The Wellness Cooperative, a recovery coaching practice based in Rahway, New Jersey.

I have a doctorate in Clinical Psychology, with specializations in Health and Cross Cultural Psychology. And my passion is working at the intersection of culture, health, and social justice.

I've spent my professional career working in college mental health; working with young people whose lives have been affected by alcohol and other drugs.

When we're talking about rates of substance use disorder, what we know is that alcohol and marijuana are primarily the drugs that are most often abused, or used, by young people and across the lifespan. Despite the similar rates in substance use, what we know is that the criminal justice system is not fair, and that instead of -- and that blacks and Latinos are overwhelmingly targeted by the police and the criminal justice system. Instead of providing compassionate treatment and support for those found in possession or using marijuana, as a nation we've chosen to incarcerate young men and women.

Those who support the movement to legalize say that legalization of marijuana is a social justice matter. However, if we look at the data from states that have decriminalized and legalized, some interesting trends emerge. We find that the narrative is flawed, based on privilege and centered in wealth. Legalization is not about social justice; it is a get-rich-quick scheme thought up by Ivy League grads with access to wealth.

Commercialization is about making money from selling a drug that people of color have been, and continue to be, arrested and incarcerated for selling; while systematically removing access to the process of owning these dispensaries.

Are we, as a state, willing to legalize marijuana, when thousands of people remain behind bars for engaging in this same enterprise, without the research about the long-term effects of this increasingly potent drug and the development on brains; without setting parameters around drug dealing and storefronts?

Legalization is a complex issue, fraught with risks, especially to youth and people of color. Why are we in such a rush to legalize?

Those in favor of legalization are minimizing the complexities related to the use of recreational marijuana; and bolstering the idea of financial gains associated with legalization are enough to motivate many to overlook these issues. For those with access to wealth and privilege, this may be the case. The likelihood of a dispensary being placed in wealthy communities like Summit, Saddle River, and Moorestown is low. They have the resources to enact bans to build dispensaries in their towns. People in middle- and working-class communities may not have the resources to move, if the climate of their neighborhoods change; or the insurance necessary to send a loved one to treatment if they develop a cannabis use disorder.

Those in the lower SES communities do not have the same resources, and are less likely to have the resources to fight the big marijuana lobby. So instead, those with access to wealth and power have used the social justice argument to get communities of color on board the legalization train by suggesting that legalization is the key to social justice. Reduced rates of incarceration, access to wealth, new job creation are all promising benefits to the community. Unfortunately, these benefits do not affect our communities equally. Owning a dispensary is a lucrative business; unfortunately, it does not provide equal access.

The New Jersey CannaBusiness Association slyly encourages everyone who wants to see legalized marijuana to join. And for \$42 you can rub elbows with the wealthy folks who can afford the \$20,000 -- let me say it again -- \$20,000 -- cost to join this organization -- that you'll now be

a lifetime member. So if you can afford a one-time payment of \$20,000, you're in. And you can rub elbows for \$42 with these folks. But to own a dispensary, it costs considerably more money; it costs close to \$1 million. I have a doctorate in Clinical Psychology; my husband is an IT guy. We make very nice money. We could not afford to own a dispensary if we wanted to; let's be clear, right? I'm a Puerto Rican woman; he's an African American man. That's just not in our-- First off, I wouldn't want to own one; but second off, it's not in our financial means, right? So to say that we have equal access is not true.

And if we look at the access to wealth -- Latinos and African Americans-- There's a definite relationship between access to wealth and to being able to open a dispensary. Less than 30 percent of Latinos-- I'm sorry; wait. I'm going off-script and I'm messing up; okay.

Twelve percent of whites are millionaires, and less than 2 percent of blacks and Latinos. That's from the U.S. Census, okay? So blacks and Latinos, in states that have legalized -- we own 10 percent of the dispensaries. That means that 90 percent of the dispensaries are owned by other people; and that's 80 percent are owned by Euro Americans. Euro Americans are 60 percent of the population. So there is not equal access to owning a dispensary; let's be clear. And you'll get all of my paper, you know -- citations -- when I hand it in.

Looking at the cannabis lobby-- Let's see; oh, okay.

So in terms of, again, the cannabis lobby-- When we look at access to wealth, there's mass marketing that's involved to our youth. And it's not simple, right? There are things like *pot tarts*; how many 7-year-olds do you know go in and buy pot tarts? No, it's not-- We're not reaching out

to the older population. We're selling pot gummy bears to our youth; let's be honest.

And for-- Realistically, for young people-- Okay; I got you.  
(laughter)

For young people and new families, taking a trip to Disney World isn't always in their access, right? But getting a few hour break, taking some pot, smoking some pot, having a glass of wine -- that's accessible, right? And so if you have access to wealth, you can have opportunities, you can do different things. You can take that break from life. Marijuana and alcohol offer a different kind of break; unfortunately, the break that it offers comes with consequences.

Legalization is not about improving the quality of lives, it is not about reducing risk, it is not about social justice. It is about commercialization, and creating wealth for those who already have access to it. It is about getting the buy-in from people of color to let the Wall Street types cultivate a prosperous new income source; which, by the way, is an income source that people of color have been trying to get into for years. But now that it's vogue to sell marijuana in a legal way -- now it's cool. Meanwhile, there are people sitting in jail.

At its worst, it is the dark side of capitalism. It is about creating American wealth on the backs of poor and marginalized people in America. Just like the Astor and Forbes families did by selling opium during the China trade, just like the Sacklers of the Purdue family, who have done -- pushing the opioids that have flooded our streets today; and just like the cannabis lobby will do, if given the opportunity to set up in poor urban areas.

I implore you to take care of the urban and working class communities in our state. If you care about the developing brains of minors, who may grow up impacted by the second-hand smoke of marijuana; if you care about reparations to individuals and families who were victims of the war on drugs, slow down this process. Do your due diligence. Set stringent standards on legalization that address releasing those who are incarcerated on marijuana-related offenses -- they are not selling products geared towards the under-30 crowd -- and ensure that profits fund evidence-based prevention efforts, as well as evidence-based treatment and recovery supports for substance use disorder. The health and well-being of our fellow citizens is at stake.

Social justice -- we cannot create social justice if we do not have a just society.

Thank you for your time.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you for your time.

Just leave copies of your testimony with us.

We're going to be pushing, and pushing, and pushing to get out of here so we don't tie up Reverend Britt's wonderful invitation and hosting to us.

Okay; so Councilman Peter Brown is coming up; Diane Litterer; Mayor Wayne Smith. And after that, we're going to have Dana Rone, Virgil Grant, and Ray Hamlin -- are going to be coming up with them; those are our business people.

Do you want to present from over there?

**COUNCILMAN PETER BROWN, Jr.:** (off mike) I can use the mike over there?

SENATOR RICE: Yes; you can use the mike over there. Yes; just stay within your timeframe, okay?

Yes, you go first since you have the presentation, okay?

COUNCILMAN BROWN: For the record, my name is Councilman Peter Brown, a Councilman in New Jersey.

**(Councilman Brown refers to information presented on an easel before the Caucus; he stands out of range of recording while presenting and, therefore, the transcription is less than complete and accurate. A copy of his presentation was not submitted for publication.)**

So I'm going to cut a lot of my testimony out because a lot has been said over and over again.

But the reason why I came--

SENATOR RICE: Could you give your name and stuff for the record?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: He did.

SENATOR RICE: Oh, he did? I'm sorry.

COUNCILMAN BROWN: --is that I actually went out to Denver, Colorado back on January 31. And so I wanted to show what they're actually selling out there.

A lot of times people keep thinking about the plant itself. And I want to very clear. The plant is gone. They're not selling the plant over there. And this is one example of what they're selling over there, and this is directly something that you go into Denver, Colorado, and you buy to consume THC. And as you can see here, something simple as an inhaler--

And if we legalize marijuana, these are the type of products we can expect that are going to come to -- here in our state.

And you can see right here -- it says, "The cannabis industry continues to move forward at a relentless pace amidst all backlash from strict government regulations around the world. The people have spoken; and when there's a movement as powerful as the one behind the cannabis industry, there is not much hope in stopping it."

Companies like Quest are bringing to market new and innovative ideas that make us rethink what cannabis consumption is all about.

And they show you right here: The goal of the business industry is to make money; it is to increase consumption, that's how they make money. And something as simple as an inhaler is one way that you can consume cannabis.

This is an example of another one that -- you can go in Denver Colorado and buy. We were talking about vapor pens -- the pens that we know our students are using to smoke in middle school and in high school. Something simple that looks like a writing pen, or mascara, or lipsticks is something that could be conceived and is meant to look cool, and stylish, and fun -- that you can basically keep in your pocket. Anyone here could be carrying it, and no one would know. And the whole point is to be able to smoke any time and in any way.

We talk about THC; and so these are some of the oil-based products that they sell. And you can see that it does list the THC -- the concentration in here. Well, what they're not telling you is that all the other chemicals that are in these products that no one is saying how these

affect your body. That will be coming to New Jersey; and whether it has an effect on you now, five years down the road, or ten years down the road -- no one know.

But they put a disclaimer in here -- that this product contains marijuana, and its potency was tested with allowable plus or minus 50 percent. But this product was produced without regulatory oversight for health, safety, or efficiency. That (indiscernible) effects those products, may be delayed by one or two hours. There may be additional health associated with the consumption of this product for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or planning to become to pregnant. But yet, this is allowable in Colorado.

So I did visit a couple of shops in-- Excuse me; I want to make it big enough so everyone can see. And you can see that this, alone, is a different type of vapor pen set you can go into the shop and buy. And it ranges anywhere from \$20 to \$50. Now, I'm not concerned about the mom-and-pop's; this is corporate America at its finest, making money that you can go, right now, and either buy stock on the Canadian stock exchange or the American stock -- on Wall Street in New York and buy some of these companies that are producing these products.

So what I did is, I took pictures of some of the other stuff, besides vapor products. You have drinks that have THC and other chemicals in there that cost no more than \$7 to buy.

You have pills; you have-- I won't even talk to you about brownies; that's a whole other subject. (laughter) You have pills with caffeine in them; you have cream in here; you have gum -- all this other

stuff, ranging from -- costing you \$20, \$36, \$20, to \$24. And it lists the THC levels in there.

I like this one the best because just when you thought they couldn't come up with anything else, you have massage oil with THC in there. (laughter) Now, I would like the doctors or the researchers of this community to explain this to me -- why we need to put THC in massage and body oil. Don't take my word; this is what they're selling over there.

Now, you think about the long-term effects. You have someone who is pregnant who is putting this on their body -- what's going to happen to our society; what's going to happen to our children. Those children are going to develop problems; and it will be up to our educational system to address that.

And I know we're short on time, but the last thing I want to do - And you have more pills here; I'm sorry. You have pills with marijuana. So if you have a problem sleeping, you go into here, and they will give you pills for you to take.

And I want to say this for one minute, before I flip over. Because the business community will tell you that children cannot get their hands on this. Come on; that's the dumbest thing I heard; because someone who is 21 years old can easily go into a store, buy a bottle of these pills for \$20, ration it out to their friends who are either 20, 19, 18 years old; the same kids who they go to school with -- college, right? Kids can get their hands on stuff now; this stuff is nothing.

And if you don't believe me that they're not trying to make a profit out there -- this is something that they sell, too. These are little stash cans; it's legal to buy marijuana in Colorado. But what they do is they also

sell you stash cans so that when you go and you buy it, and put it in a can, you walk right through the airport -- which is creating a gray market that nobody wants to talk about. And the people who are the ones who are making the money are your Wall Street guys.

Now, they're asserting that you can't be addicted to it. And, you know, you have doctors here who went to school to study the brain. And your DSM-5, and also you've got your IC -- your ICD; the World Health Organization recognizes cannabis use as a disorder. And what's happening is that the more you use these products, the greater the likelihood of you becoming addicted. What these companies want you to do is take a pill, buy some cream, vape at work, and continue to use their products off our back.

That's all I have to say.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Thank you, Councilman.

SENATOR RICE: Councilman, thank you for a great presentation; because, you know, unlike others, you actually went out there, and did some homework, and brought back what you saw and what you heard. And you know, it's not just made-up stuff; and I think that's very important. The visuals are very good too.

With that being said, why don't, Mayor, we have the young lady speak first, okay?

MAYOR WAYNE SMITH: No; absolutely.

SENATOR RICE: Ms. Diane Litterer--

DIANE LITTERER: Thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: --and then Mayor Smith.

And also, you know we have Virgil, and Dana, and Ray coming up later. And right after that, we're going to bring up John Micarelli and Kabili Tayari; and then we're going to bring up, after that, Salaam Ismial, Sammie Muhammad, and Abdul K. Shamsid-Deen. And they are supposed to be closing it out, okay?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Okay.

SENATOR RICE: Go ahead, young lady.

MS. LITTERER: Thank you very much, Senator Rice.

I'm Diane Litterer; I'm the CEO of the New Jersey Prevention Network, and I'm really happy to be here today, right here in my home county. I've spent 30 years in the field of substance use prevention, and have done 20 years of my work right here in Elizabeth, Roselle, and other communities in Union County

So it's pretty important for me to be here to be able to be a voice --not only for the experiences and the work that I've done throughout the state; but I feel it's important for me to say that I represent prevention agencies, treatment agencies, and recovery support agencies across the state that are actually too busy doing work in communities to be able to be here, spending the day to testify. So I feel that my voice is important to say that I stand in front of, and often behind, all of those folks who are strongly opposed to legalization of marijuana, because of our experiences in the community and our understanding that legalizing a substance does not keep it out of our kids' hands, but actually provides more opportunities for it to be available.

People smarter than me -- and I'm just going to quote one person, and I'm not going to read my whole testimony -- but Nora Volkow,

who is the Director of NIDA, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, said, among many things in her opposition to marijuana legalization, the higher the content of THC, the higher the likelihood that you could actually become addicted to it. And also interestingly, high content THC also has an associated risk of psychosis. Repeat marijuana use during adolescence may result in long-lasting changes in brain function that can jeopardize educational, professional, and social achievement.

However, the effects of a drug, legal or illegal, on individual health are determined not only by the pharmacological properties, but also by its availability and social acceptability. In this respect, legal drugs -- alcohol and tobacco, for example -- offer a sobering perspective, accounting for the greatest burden of disease associated with the drugs. Not because they are more dangerous than illegal drugs; but because their legal status allows a more widespread exposure.

And I think that all day we've been listening to testimony explaining that reality; and that not only does personal experience find that, but the science and the research also finds that, the legalization of a substance not only provides and increases availability in our community, but it also challenges us to fight against a very well-funded industry -- that the photos we're showing here -- spending 30 years fighting against a tobacco industry misleading our youth that it's a positive option to smoking. An alcohol industry, that promotes, "Let's have fun and drink," and there are no negative consequences.

For us to be battling another industry that's already started to influence our youth is really challenging, especially in light of the -- what often is referred to as an *opiate epidemic* here in the state and across the

country. I challenge that -- that we really have an addiction epidemic. And legalizing marijuana is going to increase use among our youth, our most vulnerable populations; and increase that addiction rate and increase the challenges that our states are facing, across the country and here in New Jersey

. And I really challenge the legislators to take consideration for all of the residents who they represent, and make sure that they consider these multiple levels of consequences and challenges of legalizing substances like this; and move forward in a smart, science-based, evidence-based way.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you very much for your work with the Prevention Network. We think it is really important, okay?

MS. LITTERER: Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: Mayor Smith.

MAYOR SMITH: Thank you, Senator Rice.

Let me thank you for holding this hearing and acting as the conscience of the State Legislature, making sure that all sides of this debate are heard, heard equally, and that fundamental fairness will be applied.

I'm not really here to tell you to legalize or not legalize marijuana; but I do want you, in your deliberations, to consider these important points.

One of my volunteer capacities I do in the private sector now, is I Chair the Board of the International Youth Organization. And it's based in the City of Newark, and we deal with young people who have been challenged by the substance we're discussing.

And so as we try to get them their high school diplomas and engage them in the workforce, we need to figure out how we're going to move forward, if we're to legalize a substance like this, and help young people in that condition move forward.

So early in my public service career I had the pleasure of writing, for the Township of Irvington, a grant. And as legislators, you're dealing with this right now, on the Governor's Council on Alcohol and Substance Abuse. There is a fund there.

And so in this whole legalization debate, if we are to legalize it, how much more money are we going to put in the Governor's Council on prevention of alcohol and substance abuse? If legalization is a -- comes to pass, will the well-funded companies put a ton of money as a threshold to enter the marketplace here in New Jersey?

Right here in Elizabeth, during earlier in my public service career, I worked with the Visiting Nurses on a project called the ASSIST; it was the *American Stop Smoking Intervention Study*. It was a major project which reduced tobacco consumption.

So as we look at, as Diane and many of the other speakers said, the issue of addiction in our communities -- black and Latino communities in particular, urban communities in particular -- we're even talking about stopping people from the tobacco scourge; then what more resources must we put in if we're going to deal with this issue? These are just the unintended consequences; and we have to get in front of them and mitigate them as much as possible. And I look at the Legislative Black Caucus, again, as the conscience of the State Legislature, making sure that you safeguard our community.

Lastly, I just want to mention these other things in your conversations. We've heard from police chiefs talking about what happens with impaired drivers. Well, what does that mean for urban insurance rates? You know, do insurance companies now ask me, "Do I smoke marijuana?" Now, do I get a discount for *not* smoking it? (laughter) You know, those are issues that, as you regulate the insurance industry and we enter this -- if we enter this new marketplace -- those are questions that, as a citizen, I have.

I'm more-- And as the first phase of the process and whatever you decide to do, I think we must decriminalize. Too many young people I deal with every day, can't enter the marketplace, can't get into schools, do something. But decriminalization also has to be regulated in a way that they're not fined where they can't function; that whether it's a community service situation-- But it has to be a balanced approach where they're not just given another sentence where they are just penalized again and again.

I want to thank you for your consideration.

Lastly -- my last comment is, if, in your wisdom, you think this is the course of action the State of New Jersey should pursue, then like every economic potential boom -- how do the African American and Latin communities participate in that process? Are we going to ensure-- We haven't done too well in the construction industry; we haven't done too well in the tech industry. So if this industry is to be promulgated in this state, how does one -- who has traditionally been locked out of the mainstream businesses in our economy -- how do we participate in this process, if that is to be? Not that I'm encouraging it, and I think all the moral institutions, like this great church, the (indiscernible), and others will

encourage and do what they can on the preventative side of it -- but we're going to be battling against well-tooled and well-heeled organizations; and so, on the government side, that is spending money on prevention right now.

So thank you for your consideration; and I hope you apply your wisdom to getting us the right course of action.

SENATOR RICE: Mayor, thank you very much. I see you are still very articulate and knowledgeable, and you stand up for what's happening.

You know, once again I think that we need to be objective. I think that we need to understand also that legalization, whether you're for or against, is a good lawyer's bill, as we say it; it's a good investor's bill for Wall Street. And even if we were to give out 50 licenses to black folks, or 25 licenses, or more, that's a handful of minority that's going to have licenses, and they're going to employ  $X$  number of people.

But if you look at the potential in it, for the foreseeable negative consequences on the whole community, and a whole race of people -- you can't put dollars to that. And that's why I'm trying to get the young people to start using good common sense, do the research themselves, and not just buy into what big money folks, like George Soros, and (indiscernible), and those people are marketing. We can't market with their monies.

So thank you very much for your testimony, because you gave us something to look at. And we do understand the struggle. It's not the youth organizations that for many years who could never get any help. And I just want to thank you.

Next, we need to bring up-- Oh, hang on a moment; I have to change mikes here for the introductions.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Thank you, Senator.

At this time, I want to bring up Virgil Grant. Virgil Grant is the first African American ever to be an owner of a dispensary and medicinal, for over 22 years legally. He is here from California.

Also I want to bring up Ray Hamlin, who is an attorney, here representing Minorities for Marijuana as well.

Dana is not going to testify, but she is also here; and (Indiscernible) is also here.

So these two gentlemen are here. And Virgil, thank you for travelling from California to be with us here today. We appreciate your presence; as well as you, Ray.

We're going to be wrapping up; but before they begin, we have refreshments and some small lunch, for everyone who wants to stay, downstairs. Thank you to Reverend Britt -- and our staff here -- has helped out with that. So anyone staying -- we have a few more speakers; you're more than welcome to join us in the downstairs of the church to have some refreshments.

Thank you.

Virgil.

**VIRGIL GRANT III:** Thank you for having me, Senator and other Assembly members and Council.

Just a couple of things. I had a speech prepared, really; but--

SENATOR RICE: Could you state your name again for the record, Virgil?

MR. GRANT: Oh, Virgil Grant.

SENATOR RICE: And from--

MR. GRANT: From California, with California Minority Alliance. Also, I'm a member of the California Black Caucus, NAACP. My partner is Chair of the NAACP Cannabis Task Force.

And I'm here on behalf of the New Jersey Minority Alliance.

I just want to talk on a couple of things, and I will be as brief as possible.

When we talked about addiction-- I spent four years in college studying psychology; and I listened to the various speakers prior to me. The first part of addiction is they send you to counseling; they send you to a psychologist, because there is something that they have to deal with you mentally. That's what addiction is all about. We like to take addiction and put it to something tangible, except for the mental capacity. And that's what has to be dealt with in order to deal with addiction, because people stop when they want to.

There are a lot of people who I know who were addicted who just stopped, and they didn't go through anything. My mom smoked for 30 years and just stopped, cold turkey, because she decided not to.

But, you know, we want to try to tie that to something and say, "Well, the cigarettes--" No, she made a decision to smoke, then she made a decision to stop. And I have family members who were on drugs who did the same thing. Some people aren't strong enough; some people are.

I heard a lot of talk about Denver; and Denver, maybe, should have looked at California. California had a 22-year history of medical marijuana. All of the stuff that's going on in Denver -- I haven't heard that

in California; we've been around 22 years, and I can't understand how Denver can't get a control on their markets; shame on Denver. Maybe it was because they brought recreational cannabis to their industry instead of adult-use. Because when we talk about adult-use, we take children out of the conversation. When you talk about *recreation*, we're talking fun, parks, play -- what the gentleman just showed on that board. But when we talk about *adult-use*, we're not talking about children; we're talking about protecting the children.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Exactly.

MR. GRANT: So we have to understand when we speak, how we speak. When we present something, it's how we present it, whether children will take hold to it. Like the man said -- gummy bears; children take hold to that.

But then there also has to be responsible parents who are consuming, who keep their stuff locked away, like they do their gun; like they do their cabinet with their medicine in it. They keep that out of reach of children. So they need to be responsible about that, too.

Also, there were studies-- When you talk about studies in other states, they had to start from zero, because it had never been studied before. So of course you're going to have this influx, this increase, because you're starting from nothing. There were no studies prior to that. And a lot of the things that were said today haven't been studied, like the brain psychologist, or the young lady who spoke here about the brain -- a lot of that stuff, like she said -- they're still waiting to get studies from it.

Yes, we don't know; there are a lot of things we don't know. When we talk about DUIs -- what is the starting point of a DUI? Like the

officer spoke -- there was no starting point. So now you have a starting point, and you can study from that point on. Every time you study something from that point on, it is going to increase, unfortunately.

When you don't have a legal market, you don't have what you call *registered consumers*. So, what, nobody smokes? Nobody was smoking before medical marijuana came to New Jersey? Nobody was smoking before adult-use comes to New Jersey? Oh, it just now comes all of a sudden because of adult-use. No; the look upon it -- the studies come now that adult-use is passed; now that medical marijuana passes. So of course, there's going to be an increase because you started from nothing.

So I just want us to be very aware of how we look at things -- understanding when another gentleman talked about the taxation, and the regulating grows, and the Federal government coming in. No, there's something called the *CJS Amendment* that defunds the Federal government from coming into any state that has a medical marijuana law or an adult-use. So that cannot happen; so I just wanted to kind of clear up some of that.

And I want to speak towards the Scutari Bill. Although this Bill speaks to the spirit and the harm created by the failed war on drugs, there is nothing in the Bill that is truly a solution to the problem, moving forward. We cannot move forward until these laws are put into place that are inclusive. Laws, as you see, address the failed war on drugs, but there's no social equity proposal that was drafted. We have one here by HHR, Hunt, Hamlin & Ridley; and NJMA, New Jersey Minority Alliance. And this is a step in the right direction. It's a win-win situation; the State collects its tax revenues from the businesses, and with the money generated from these

communities can begin to take care of themselves. We're not looking for a handout; we are demanding an opportunity. There is language that needs to be implemented in this bill for change. And there is language in the Bill that needs to be changed; language that sticks out to me like *good faith effort*. What does this truly mean, and who determines the outcome? There is no trust in a good faith effort. We need more definitive language in this proposal suggested.

Social equity is a moral obligation to any lawmaker and elected official who is involved in this process to create a cannabis adult-use bill. When we look at the failed war on drugs and how it devastated generations of minority communities, the social equity program is a no-brainer. I charge each and every one of you with the responsibility to do the right thing. New Jersey shall be the leader of moving forward on the East Coast with adult-use in the right direction.

Medical marijuana has passed with no consideration of a social equity program; and that's a shame. Only one minority-owner; I say, shame on New Jersey for allowing that to happen because we wouldn't allow that to happen in California.

Let's not make the same mistake again with adult-use and the issuance of more -- in adult-use. They're talking about issuing out more medical marijuana licenses. Well, where do we stand in all of that? You know, a couple of gentlemen were talking about the finance and the money, versus the risk. And I get that; we have to study that. But don't miss the money; don't let that money pass by and let them get it. Because they're going to push forward; they're going to bring money in to open up these businesses and make it happen, and then what? We're still sitting on the

other side of the counter, spending our money with them? Because these people out there who are consuming cannabis are not going to stop. They're going to consume cannabis. Where do we want to be in this whole issue?

I just want to be clear: I am the single person who started the social equity conversation; the *what about us*. It came from California all the way to the East Coast. That's when Senator Cory Booker spoke out about it; that was when the Reverend off the East Coast -- I can't recall his name right now -- but he spoke out about it, and then it just took effect all over the country. We have to understand that, yes, we want to protect our children; yes, we want to make sure that there are resources coming into our community; yes, we want to make sure our communities aren't inundated with these businesses, and we want them to be spread around lightly. But that's what good policy and legislation is all about.

Regulations, smart and sensible regulations is what we did in California; and I feel that's what should be done here in New Jersey.

Thank you very much.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you also; and thank you for travelling to share that with us.

We need to move a car -- GTS 435. It's a Toyota RAV4; is that right?

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: RAV4.

SENATOR RICE: Okay. If that's your vehicle, would you just move it so someone can get out?

And let me just-- The next speaker--

Go ahead, Ray; Mr. Hamlin, sir.

**RAYMOND L. HAMLIN, Esq.:** Good afternoon, Senator Rice; and thank you for having me here, Assemblyman Holley, Councilwoman Perkins. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today.

The reason that I am here, primarily, is to advocate in support of what we have coined as *social equity* -- *a social equity program*. Myself -- along with Dana Rone, my partner Ronald Hunt, Mohammad Aqeel -- wanted to make sure that if marijuana became legal in New Jersey for adult use, that folks in urban communities -- people who look like me, black and brown folks -- have an opportunity to participate in the business, in the business of marijuana.

And before I really stepped into this full force, I wanted to see it for myself. So I took a trip to Los Angeles, because I wanted to see what the dispensaries were like; I wanted to see what the process was like. Because as an attorney, who's been practicing law at Hunt, Hamlin & Ridley for 28 years now, representing people across the State of New Jersey in all types of matters -- criminal defense, Civil Rights cases primarily -- what we've seen over the course of the last 28 years is what you know and what you see in the studies by the ACLU -- which is people of color disproportionately affected by the war on drugs.

So if marijuana becomes legal, why would we be disproportionately affected in the financial benefits of it? I'm not going to sit here and apologize for the possibility that there is money to be earned from a business such as this. I reached out to my father, who was a life-long police officer, who arrested people for marijuana. I wanted to get his idea; I wanted to get his thoughts on what he thought about this process. And he

said, “Listen, if marijuana is illegal, then folks should be arrested for it. If it’s legal, then folks should be able to benefit from it being legal.”

So I support you with your desire to try and ensure that people of color, people who have been impacted by this negative idea associated with cannabis--

And what I can also tell you are a couple of other things. In New Jersey, a person can’t have their vehicle, or their house, or their person searched without probable cause and/or a warrant. There are some exceptions, where you can search a vehicle if you see something in plain sight, if you get consent from the person.

Recently, there’s been what’s called a *plain smell test*. The plain smell test allows law enforcement to search a person’s vehicle merely on the basis that they say they smell marijuana. They don’t have to find marijuana; they can find something else that is totally unassociated with that.

What we’ve seen is a rash of these cases where there’s no warrant, there’s no consent; people are removed from their vehicles, they are arrested, they’re placed in handcuffs, and then the police start to search to justify being placed in handcuffs, justify being detained.

And it is the equivalent to the *stop-and-frisk* that was deemed illegal. Now it’s something different. So by legalizing-- I understand we talk about decriminalization, but by legalizing it, that is not basis to invade someone’s privacy. That is not a basis to stop someone on the road and then subject them to being placed in handcuffs, being placed outside of their vehicles while law enforcement searches to determine whether or not what they say they smell is actually the case.

So what we've done is an analysis of this social equity idea. In Colorado, there are about 3,000 licenses for owners. One is owned by an African American; one.

Medical marijuana in New Jersey has been legal for nine years. There are no African American owners. I don't know of any African American growers. I don't know of any African American individuals as part of the transportation process.

So when I went to California and I met with Mr. Grant, what I wanted him to do was to take me around to all different neighborhoods where these dispensaries exist. We were in Watts; we were in Compton; we were in other areas of L.A. -- downtown L.A. Here's what I saw and what I didn't see.

I didn't see lines out front, people smoking weed. I never saw it. I didn't see people inside looking like they're up to no good; in fact, what Mr. Grant told me, is that we have the ability to deny people access if we think that they're up to no good; if they're not at a level or standard that we think is appropriate.

I went to other communities; I didn't see anything. What I saw was the equivalent to going -- and maybe this is the wrong analysis, or the wrong analogy, but this is the analysis I'm going to use -- it's like going to a liquor store. I assume when alcohol was illegal in the United States, maybe they had discussions like this; maybe they didn't. But if they had the opportunity, I'm sure there were tons of people who were against it, and I assume there were people who were for it.

My concern is, if it becomes legal, are we going to be in front of the line to ensure that there's equity, that there's opportunities for all of us?

Or are we not going to be in the line at all? Because when alcohol became legal, we weren't in the line; people of color weren't in the line. So the hope is with this social equity program that we've created-- There was concern about the cost factor; it's not going to be available for people of color because we don't have that much money. Well, we've developed an opportunity in the program that would enable someone who's in these impacted communities to be an owner. And if you have an investor, you still have an ownership interest. You would have to ensure that you maintain that ownership interest in order to keep your license.

There is a component where 1 percent of your budget would have to be reinvested into the community where you have the actual dispensary or the business. And let's not be mistaken; this is not just dispensaries that are opening up. There are transportation opportunities that people aren't thinking about. There are marketing opportunities that people aren't thinking about. There are manufacturing opportunities; there's distribution; there are growing opportunities; there's lab work; there are technicians. There are all types of job opportunities that are available.

And for those who have criminal records for disorderly persons offenses in New Jersey -- people don't understand that if you have a possession of marijuana offense that you have a conviction for, you have to wait five years to get an expungement -- possibly, it can be reduced -- five years not from the date of the incident, five years from the date you finish your probation. So if you're given probation for two or three years, that's now eight years. If it's an indictable offense, a fourth-degree offense, it's now 10 years from the date that you finish your probation.

We want to ensure that people of color and people in these impacted communities have an opportunity. That's all we're looking for. And the idea that you have to get a job in State government, that you have to get a job in the local county or the municipality -- listen, own a business. I've owned a business for 28 years; I work every day, and I work hard for my business. It can be the same thing for those who have been impacted, and that's what we're here for.

I have this social equity program that I'd like to present for the record so that you have an idea of where we're coming from, with respect to this.

SENATOR RICE: First, I want to thank you very much for your testimony; we'll take that.

But let me just say -- I'm proud of you, and Ron, and the rest of your firm because I did not realize it's been 28 years, where we were cutting ribbons; so I know you're getting older.

Let me also say that some of the-- The Legislative Black Caucus -- I can speak on our behalf -- we're just as much concerned about social justice as well as equity issues. As a black firm, you recognize that all black firms in the state, basically, are getting business many places. So we're used to the fact that we're the least to get anything. But we're also smart enough to say we're going to be objective to look at whether or not getting, for some of us, outweighs the costs of what happens to whole communities and people of color. So we have to be very cognizant about that.

And I think that the speaker before you -- in fact, it was Virgil and others who spoke -- there have been no longitudinal studies. So if you

have nothing, it's not in the study. But if we have something, you can study it. But those of us who know for the last four years in Colorado -- and that's why it comes up so much, because they've been the longest study, in terms of the legalization and the way they did it with recreation. But the reality is that there are some things that may be beneficial to some people, but there are some serious negatives taking place. And for New Jersey to move without paying attention to what we do know-- And as you attorneys said, what's foreseeable is the wrong way to go for New Jersey to talk about legalization. We're smart enough, as a Caucus, as a whole, to know that if we don't get decriminalization and social justice that way, that there has to be conversations and things of that magnitude to make sure that there is equity. But that's in everything we do; whether we legalize marijuana or not, we're going to fight every day for social justice and equity.

And so the reality is that I don't want people to think that the Legislative Black Caucus is not (indiscernible); but the question is, do we address the social justice issue without legalization if legalization has a tremendous impact on communities of color? What it appears to be is that "black folks" in particular, and Civil Rights leaders, and some others who are saying that there's money to be made and we have to be part of the conversation -- they're not saying what you said. You said *if*; I listened very well -- *if*. The others are saying *if*-- The others are saying we *have* to do it because they see something personally in it for them, with their business and a handful of people. We have to look at a total community, and we have to look at social justice.

And I think, you know, as an attorney the folks whose records need to be expunged and the penalties -- whether it's a third- or fourth-

degree, etc. -- we can address all of that through social justice, through decriminalization, if we really wanted to. I just don't think that "the majority" of the non-minorities in the Legislature are willing to give us social justice -- I've been there 32 years -- the way we want social justice. They'll give us social justice the way they want it; and the way they want it is to make sure that they make money, and, as you said, we aren't excluded.

So we have to be a part of the conversation; I get that. But I really wish folks would say that if. In the meanwhile, let's talk about doing the immediate thing; let's decriminalize and at least get (indiscernible) while we still take a look at whether or not legalization is the right thing to do.

But once again, thank you very much for your testimony; we're going to have that.

The next speaker who is coming up -- and we're pretty much finished now -- is going to be Kabili Tayari; and John Micarelli.

And then, after that, you have Salaam Ismial, Sammie Muhammad, Abdul K. Shamsid-Deen, okay?

And then, after that, we're going to have Dianna from the ACLU; and Leo--

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: And Dianna is with a group; she's with--

SENATOR RICE: Yes; Leo Bridgewater and, I think, Burt Booth, okay?

Hang on one moment.

Is John Micarelli still here? Is John Micarelli still here? (no response)

No? Okay, so Kabili -- go ahead.

**K A B I L I T A Y A R I:** My name is Kabili Tayari; I'm from the City of Jersey City.

But I'm no Johnny-come-lately to this question of social equity and social justice.

When I first heard about maybe a month ago, that under the leadership of Senator Ronald Rice these three hearings were set up, I was glad and I thought immediately about Reverend Congressman Adam Clayton Powell and my big brother and friend, the Mayor of Jersey City, State Senator Glen Cunningham during these kinds of things, because they're necessary.

But I'm glad I stayed all day, because Senator Rice is absolutely correct. Making money is not disconnected from social justice and social equity. But the few cannot benefit while the majority continue to suffer.

What has been happening to us in the past 40 years is that few are benefitting. There are a few black *this*, and a few black *that*, a few black *this*; while the majority of the people are suffering every day and have no access to opportunity.

And what we're looking at is the question of access to opportunity for empowerment, control, and a better community.

I want to focus on an article that came out March 19, 2018, out of the *New York Times*. "Black men raised in the top 1 percent by millionaires are as likely to be incarcerated as white men raised in households earning about \$36,000."

Now, we need to focus on the fact that Reverend King has been assassinated; that things have gotten worse for most of us. A man by the

name of Rick Jones -- he's a Professor at Columbia University -- he's also the Executive Director of a group called Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem. And he wrote a piece that came out December of 2017. By getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them, night after night, on the evening news. Did we know they were lying about the drugs? Of course we did -- the admission by John Erlichman, a domestic policy chief, in the Nixon Administration.

Now, he goes on -- that is, Brother Jones -- and says, "Sadly, even as the United States comes to terms with the true motives of marijuana policy and individual states undertake campaigns to legalize, racism still influences the policy in marijuana; and the damage brought about by the war on drugs continues to plague communities of color."

He goes on further to say, "Countrywide, blacks are nearly four times as likely as whites to be arrested for marijuana possession. The movement to decriminalize marijuana is a welcomed step in the right direction, in so far as it never should have been criminalized."

Now, he talks about Colorado in his analysis--

SENATOR RICE: Excuse me one moment; because I hate to interrupt you.

Urgent -- Tahoe S94 HWB; the car is blocking. Could you please just move that?

Okay, Councilman. (laughter)

Go ahead, Kabili.

MR TAYARI: He goes on to talk about Colorado, which has been cited a lot today. But he also talks about Maryland, which also has legalized marijuana. And he says, "In a state that is a third black, Maryland apparently sees nothing wrong with 58 percent of the marijuana possessions arrests being black people, while effectively preventing them from profiting by the same means they are punished for."

And he also talks a little bit about some of the proposals in Los Angeles that need to be implemented immediately.

I am more concerned -- and I applaud you, Senator Rice; I applaud you -- for raising up this discussion in the manner of the many, and not the few. Because what needs to happen while we are talking -- and I thank God for being under the tutelage of a man by the name of Middy Baraka, who taught us that self-determination is a thing that we should all benefit from. And when only a few benefit, something is wrong with that. That is not self-determination.

Some people say, "Well, the ministers and the rest of them -- you know, they're on some moral kick." That is the other problem that has happened to black America. When you study our history, if it was not for us being on the moral kick, the Jesus kick, the Islamic kick -- because we first came as Muslims -- any of those religious faith kicks, America would have blown up a hundred years ago. It has been us that has saved that.

Here's what I think would help, Senator; here are my suggestions.

We should say in this discussion, "Governor Murphy, have your Attorney General direct prosecutors to stop charging and prosecuting people for marijuana possession offenses. Put them in things like drug

court. Have automatic expungements for first-time offenders. Bring about immediate expungements for others that does not take longer than a year to start processing.”

Also, the mothers who are incarcerated in Clinton -- when they are released, help them to get the immediate return of their children.

There should not be more than five retail outlets in any city that is allowed to ever sell legal marijuana.

And the other thing -- priority should be making sure ex-offenders get long-term career jobs; be able to enroll in college; be able to vote; be able to receive a home with HUD assistance.

We need to look at the fact that the American Academy of Pediatrics, in 2004 as well as in 2015, opposed legalization of marijuana, but supports decriminalization. Decriminalization should be a discussion that leads to legalization. And if there's going to be legalization, it needs to lead immediately to decriminalization. But first and foremost, anything that does not include social justice and social equity is nothing we need to be considering.

Thank you again; and I really mean it. Continue to do what you're doing on this subject, Senator Rice.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you, Kabili. As always, it's good to hear your wisdom and years of experience come out of the Civil Rights movement.

And I just want, for the record -- because I'm going to say this every time I get a chance -- those who promulgate legalization and keep putting down decriminalization, and say that decriminalization doesn't work for us because it means that black folks are still getting arrested three

times more -- well, when you legalize drugs, you still get arrested. Up to this point, you don't; just like decrim, over here you still get arrested. That's why in Colorado, when they legalized drugs -- in all the pictures you've seen -- the number of black people who are incarcerated is still more than three times greater than white folks. The number of young people who go into emergency rooms with marijuana-related illnesses have gone up tremendously; the number of college students who never use drugs has gone up tremendously, and they're dropping out of schools and they can't get jobs.

And that's why I said, be objective about what we do. We can do decriminalization tomorrow; and the bills that myself, and Holley, and others have in for decrim -- it may need some fixing, but we can do decrim. And we need to do decrim while we look at legalization from some of our perspective.

But the reality is that your conversation made good sense; and I think the conversation of pretty much everybody here made good sense. But I think that black folks -- and I'm going to keep emphasizing this; I'm not ashamed to say *black* -- we need to lead, and stop following and taking everybody else's information. And we're given their interpretation, when we can research and lead ourselves. And I hope that the Legislative Black Caucus, and this majority, as a Caucus, continues to be leaders in everything we do for social justice.

With that being said, we're going to call up the next speakers here.

I'm going to ask Assemblyman Holley to just call the members up.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Sure.

SENATOR RICE: I think they're already (indiscernible).

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Salaam Ismial; Sammie Muhammad; and also Abdul K. Shamsid-Deen.

**S A L A A M I S M I A L:** Good afternoon, New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus, under the leadership of Senator Ron Rice, Assemblyman Holley, Councilwoman-at-Large Patricia Perkins-Auguste.

I am Salaam Ismial; I'm the former Director of the National Youth Council Incorporated, operating out of this particular city for 35 years.

Just yesterday-- Well, tomorrow I have to go to court with a kid who was caught with some marijuana; and I'm going to do everything in my power to not, hopefully -- he does not go to jail.

His mom said that he's addicted to weed. On the street they call them *weed heads*, him and his boys.

And they tell me they just can't stop smoking the weed. Now, they have all different kinds of styles; where -- names they call this weed. And I look at some of the reports; it's almost similar-- When I heard Councilman Peter Brown talk about the different flavors and the different potencies of the weed, it's going to be the same thing. Remember the cigarettes? Some of you old head, black activists -- when they said Kools and the Newports were targeted more so in the black community because of the nicotine with a higher, whatever, *yada ya?* And then of course--

And so I'm not going scientific; I'm just going with some real stuff. I'm talking like the mind of these young people who are going to be more impacted by this legislation.

And I would suggest -- I'm going to start from the back -- that Murphy, good Governor Murphy -- if he wants to do something; if this is going to be legalization, Assemblyman, then we need to talk about those brothers who were arrested for those low-levels drug offenses with marijuana. You're going to release them, and you're going to release them with the expungement, with a job, with the counseling, and so forth and so on.

And so I talk to some of the owners -- potential owners, black owners, who want this; and I get it. But like the Senator said, we cannot do it on morals. We cannot give up social justice in the wake of a few who may get some dispensary operations. We can't do that. And certainly, this voice and this organization will not sit idly by and let that happen.

Now, if this becomes law -- which some predict it will -- then we, as African Americans, the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus need to step up, real strong, to make sure that the legalization doesn't have a (indiscernible) effect on our community, our black community, our young black community, where 61 percent of the population is in prison right now and our people like us. They're not even fixing that problem, and they're talking about bringing the so-called alcohol, the cigarette kind of mindset back into our community.

And the dispensaries -- where are they going to be located? I want it a hundred miles from our community, because I'm tired of seeing liquor stores, cigarette shops, convenience stores; now they're going to be filled with these flavored marijuana cigarettes, and so forth and so on.

Lastly, I'll say this -- that, you know, April 4 we'll be commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. -- his assassination. I'm

certain-- My mother worked with Dr. King, and I'm certain if Dr. King had this microphone, he would not only not support this, but he would want this whole operation, these whole public hearings tabled until we deal with some other issues that have been a dying need in our black community.

So the challenge is, my brother, Senator Rice, and the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus, to follow this thing through. Monitor it, and be just as strong-minded and position yourself. If this becomes legal, to be in a position to protect our community, our young people; and the economic, social, and political impact that is going to devastate our community. We don't want any more of this; we're tired of this kind of stuff.

So that's basically all I want to say.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Amen.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you.

**S A M M I E M O H A M M A D:** Sammie Mohammad, Chairman of the Elizabeth Local Organizing Committee.

First thing I want to say -- I must be the only one in here, other than the young lady who admitted to a drug problem, and the other lady who lost her daughter, who really understands the effect of drugs. Because everybody is up here talking out of a book.

I have 30 years clean. (applause)

Don't tell me -- don't tell me that marijuana is a recreational drug and it doesn't do any damage to your brain. I started smoking marijuana when I was 15 years old. By the time I was 18, I was shooting heroin. Don't tell me it's not a gateway drug.

But check this out: Out of all the different drugs I've done, I ran into police cars two times; check it out -- police cars; 1974, I ran into a police car in Roselle, smoking Acapulco gold; 1986, ran into a police car in Newark, smoking wacky weed. No coke, no dope; you understand, smoking marijuana. Don't tell me marijuana is not dangerous. You're going to have all kinds of car accidents and fatalities when marijuana becomes legal; you're having it now.

You can't sugar coat this thing because the government wants some more money. This is the same thing that happened with the prohibition of alcohol, you understand? Blacks were flourishing over there in Harlem, you understand? And then the Depression hit; you legalized alcohol. Same thing with the legal numbers. Blacks and Italians were flourishing, and then we made it a lottery, huh? Now, the Hispanic community has made millions and millions of dollars, and they're buying up everything; buying up everything from marijuana sales. Now you want to shut that down and take control of that money. Come on; we are going to keep it real up in here, or let's not talk at all.

And I'm going to end on this note. I hope you didn't go to Jersey City, like you came to Elizabeth; where we had to wait -- Salaam Ismial, Imam Kabir, and myself. We are out here on the streets, dealing with our young people, every day; trying to stop the violence, trying to get them off drugs. And our strong pastors, like Reverend Townsend, Reverend Britt, Reverend Adair. You didn't reach out to any of us; we had to force our way to these microphones. I hope you don't go to Atlantic City like that, without reaching out to the people who are on the ground there.

See, this is not Colorado; this is not California. This is Elizabeth, New Jersey. And for your information, we don't have a problem with marijuana. Our young people are smoking K2 today. You see, Newark has been devastated by K2; Elizabeth has been devastated by K2. This drug thing is too serious for a few dollars that are only going to affect a few.

Your salaries are going to stay the same, you understand? But those who don't care anything about the youth and about the moral conduct of America-- We have a nut in the White House who wants to kill drug dealers. He's talking about these young boys on the streets, in the black neighborhoods -- he wants to kill. He's not talking about the cartels, and the big boys, and the pharmaceutical companies. He's talking about killing the young black man on the corner who might be selling a few drugs just to buy chicken wings because his mother and father are hooked on drugs, so he has to sell drugs just to eat; that's all he knows.

See, I don't want to hear about these other places. We have a very serious drug problem here in Union County, Essex County, Hudson County.

I'm passionate about it, because I'm here by the grace of God, like I told you; from 15 to 18, from reefer to heroin.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Amen; that's all right, Brother Sammie.

SENATOR RICE: Thank you Brother Sammie.

Thank you.

**I M A M A B D U L - K A B I R S H A M S I D - D E E N:** Imam Abdul-Kabir Shamsid-Deen; Elizabeth, New Jersey.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to share these words.

And, you know, I was here since about 10:30; I heard everything that was said. I heard all the documentation, the research, the professionals. And I was thinking about -- and all the politicians -- and I was thinking about a quote, a saying, that one of the most brilliant minds that America ever produced -- and that's a man by the name of Malcolm X, who many people wrote off, but he said that America's democracy is nothing but disguised hypocrisy; very, very important.

When you look at the devastation of drugs-- And I think about the progression of drugs and the drug bomb; you know, the drug bomb. When the drug bomb was hit on African Americans, it literally wiped us out. See, African Americans got a real, clear picture of the devastation of the drugs -- marijuana, liquor, dope, pills, promiscuity, AIDS -- and on, and on, and on, and on. And you'll find that we are very passionate about being against any legalizing -- anything that will alter the state of our people and continue to have what's becoming self-abusers and abusers of others.

This is a very, very serious issue that must have not just a moral, but a spiritual foundation. I'm sitting here; we're in a church, we're having this meeting in a church. If you're having this meeting in a church, there's no way that we can get around the spiritual basis of the human being. This is serious; we're talking about lives. We're not talking about just making money for the sake of making money; we're talking about saving human beings.

And any time you talk about legalizing any drug or mind-altering substance -- just like you legalized alcohol -- and then you want to charge a human being with a crime of hitting someone, or assaulting someone, because they are under the influence of alcohol, which has been legalized in America -- see, that's the hypocrisy -- that you want to charge a human being with what you said is all right -- for you to drink -- but now, when you're under this influence of this substance and you commit a crime, we're going to lock you up.

So if you're really going to serve these people, you have to be against anything that will move them to cause injury to themselves and other human beings.

So he said that, "America's democracy is nothing but disguised hypocrisy." And it's very, very hypocritical to charge a person after you've given them permission. You've given them permission to get high, and you're giving people permission to say, "You can smoke marijuana" And if you haven't had the real experience of what marijuana does, and the kind of mindset, and the kind of lifestyle it produces, you don't understand. It's serious; it's devastating. As I said, the drug bomb had been dropped on black folks, and we understand the devastation. You go to Camden right now; the devastation of Camden from drugs, the devastation of Newark from drugs, and the devastation of Elizabeth from drugs. In fact, the devastation of Roselle-- I remember when Roselle was a very nice city; Linden, the devastation--

So when we're talking about legalizing that which will affect and cause injury and harm to human beings, to themselves, and others; we need to really, really think about that. Really, really think about; and I said

we're in a church. How are we going to be in a church talking about legalizing something that's going to cause human beings to abuse themselves? (laughter)

We have to take this-- This is serious business, when we start talking about the value of a human being. And God's mission is to preserve human life; not to destroy it. And if we sit in here talking about legalizing a mind-altering substance, which not only alters the mind, it alters the lifestyle, we put ourselves in a bad position.

So it's more than about a little bit of money. I'm going to give you the biblical verse that says, what would profit a man if he gained the world, but lost his soul? And this is where we find people losing their souls for money; but look at the major injury.

So I thank you very much for allowing me to make these few comments.

Thank you, and God bless you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Thank you, gentlemen, so much for your testimony. You, all three, are gentlemen I respected here in our community for a very long time. You've been on the forefront.

I do want to just reemphasize to you, and everyone who also is here, Brother Mohammad and Salaam Ismial, is that the reason why we're conducting these hearings across the State of New Jersey is exactly the points that you are displaying today. Medical marijuana was passed through New Jersey nine years ago. I don't remember seeing anyone in this audience at a hearing in Trenton--

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike) We didn't know about it.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: --I don't remember anyone being invited to Trenton for a hearing.

The point that I'm trying to make is that this legalization of marijuana is real. It is running rampant throughout the State of New Jersey; it is running rampant throughout the country. So what the Senator and the members of the Legislative Black Caucus said is, is that you probably won't come down to Trenton to testify, because you probably will not know when the hearings are going to be. So we're bringing it to you so that you can help us raise the issues; that as this process goes through its legislative process, that your voices are heard. This is not about you against me; me against Ronald Rice; Ronald Rice-- We're your leaders; we have 18 members in the Legislative Black Caucus. If we all stick together -- 19 now; we just got one, with the new one -- if we stick together as a unit, nothing *won't* move. But we can't have this back-and-forth with you yelling at us, and-- We're your leaders to try to tell you we're taking this on the road, through every region of the state, to assure that your voices are what we're hearing today -- that we can take it back down to Trenton, to the rest of our Caucus members, and the rest of our colleagues -- the 80 members in the Assembly and the 40 in the Senate -- that this is what we heard on the road. And this is-- While you may want to get this through, here is how we're going to vote; and we can vote with you, but these issues that we've heard throughout the State of New Jersey are going to be addressed. That's why we're here today.

So no one is going to invite you personally to any hearing; it was a public event. We have another one in Atlantic City; and we're going

to come back on the road again -- Senator Rice wants us to -- to hear more of your concerns, because this thing is moving.

Now, we could take a step back and let all legislation pass through the State House, like it normally does. We have bills that passed yesterday that half of you don't even know about, okay? We can sit by idly, as Black Caucus members, to say, "You know what? Let it just go through."

But we decided not to do that. We said, "We're going to go on the road, despite what our differences are." At the end of the day, it's going to come to a vote. But we want to be able to be in a position to say that, "Our members of our community have said *this*; and this is what we want incorporated in this law, in this legalization of marijuana bill."

So I don't want to get off-base with it. I think we had a very good hearing today. I don't want people's local politics to play an issue in this type of hearing, because that's not what it's about. This is about hearing concerns so that as your leaders -- because we're here, and we're not going anywhere -- that we want to incorporate what we hear today.

And I can tell you that I do support the legalization of marijuana; but I'm not voting on the legalization of marijuana until there's an equity or social justice piece put in there. I'm the author of the Assembly decriminalization bill now, with bipartisan support. Senator Rice is heading it up in the Senate. So we're on top of these issues; nothing's going to get through, but we have to hear from you, and we respect each other as we go through this process so that as our community, that we are all a part of, is represented equally.

I just wanted to put that on the record.

Senator, I know we have one final speaker.

SENATOR RICE: Yes.

Let me just say to my Muslim brothers that it's so good to hear your voices.

For those who don't know it, a gold--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Hyundai Sonata.

SENATOR RICE: --Sonata; VKY28N; if you could move that, we'd appreciate it.

We have just one more speaker -- three speakers -- coming up together. We're going to move out of here.

But I just want to say it's good to hear that. For those who don't know it -- we don't talk about our personal lives. And even though some of us have never been affected personally by drug addiction, we have family members. For the record, my sister got locked up years ago when she left high school for drugs -- is in the hospital now. I don't know how long she's going to

live, because it tore her insides up; and she started with marijuana. Her son, who graduated high school a couple of years ago, did very well. And as soon as he finished, he did the marijuana thing; he's locked up now.

And we don't talk about those things; we don't have to. But I do know the history of black folks, and black folks' struggle. I've been around a long time. My gray hair is not premature; this is real stuff. And I just want young black folks to be more objective in their views regarding who they work for; and I think that's important. That's why what you said was so powerful to me; it made me feel good.

The final thing I want to say before we call up the others is that the Legislative Black Caucus -- we don't know everybody in New Jersey. But we've been organizing elected officials and others. On these hearings -- when these hearings go out, we did about 4,000 robocalls into this county and elsewhere. We notified clergy members statewide from the list that we have, and Imams statewide, that we were having this. And so some of the people you see here is because we have tried to get the word out. I didn't personally invite all these folks. And, you know -- but we did invite the speakers from out of state; because I think it's important, if someone is going to do something in another state that New Jersey is doing, and we have experiences, they should come and we should invite them in. And they shouldn't invite us in to tell us what's going on in New Jersey. So we can learn from that.

So I just want to keep that record clear, because it's very important. And we don't want confusion about the fact that there are two sides to this argument.

Okay; let me have that list there, please.

The final speakers -- and I want to thank everybody for being so patient, especially Reverend Britt and his church for staying around -- but there were three -- hang on a moment -- there were three--

Okay; we have the ACLU; are you speaking? Dianna?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Dianna?

SENATOR RICE: And then we have Leo Bridgewater; is Leo Bridgewater here?

And we have-- I don't know if this B-U-T-H--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: No; that's just a "no,"  
Senator.

SENATOR RICE: Oh.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: That's just a "no."

SENATOR RICE: Oh; I thought it said "both."

ASSEMBLYWOMAN SUMTER: Leo and Dianna together.

SENATOR RICE: All righty. So these are our final speakers.  
And I want to thank you for your patience, too; but you're  
really kind of like add-ons, and we weren't going to do any add-ons. But  
out of respect to the Assemblyman, I did that, okay?

**DIANNA HOUENOU, Esq.:** Good afternoon, Senator.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Dianne Houenou; I'm the Policy Counsel with the  
ACLU of New Jersey. The ACLU has been a proponent of -- we advocate  
for legalization, because it's a racial justice and a social justice issue for us.  
The ACLU has opposed marijuana prohibition since the 1960s; so this is  
nothing new for us.

Now, we had several speakers come today and talk about  
statistics and numbers from New Jersey and from other states. And we can  
throw them around and debate statistics all day; especially, Senator, as you  
know, the ACLU can certainly throw out some statistics as well. But I'm  
not going to do that today.

We have home health aides, massage therapists, nail  
technicians -- people who work hard in our state, in New Jersey, who are  
losing their jobs because they did something that our United States  
Presidents and our legislators have admitted to doing in the past. They,

though, had the unfortunate circumstance of getting arrested for it and being tattooed for life.

A single arrest for marijuana possession in New Jersey can mean you lose your job and be barred from other jobs in the future. You can lose your student financial aid; if you're an immigrant, you can be deported. You lose your driver's license, you can lose your housing, and you can lose your kids.

This is what we're currently doing; this is our current standard of operating in New Jersey.

Now, these impacts are ripping our families and our communities apart, and it must stop.

Other states have recognized the errors of marijuana prohibition and the harms that it has inflicted on communities. But instead of burying their heads in the sand, they decided to stop those harms. And now among the states -- the nine states, plus D.C., that have legalized marijuana for adults-- We're talking about adults, 21 and over; we're not talking about kids here -- among the nine states and the District of Columbia that have legalized marijuana for adults, none of them have turned back. The sky has not fallen in Colorado, or in Washington, or in California, or in any other state that has legalized. If it had, those states would have reinstated prohibition; but that's not what has happened.

Earlier this month, Colorado elected official Dan Pabon testified before the Assembly Oversight Reform and Federal Relations Committee on March 5. And this Colorado lawmaker was originally opposed to marijuana legalization; he voted against it in 2012. But as he explained to our Assembly Committee earlier this month, he recognizes that

-- he doesn't have those misgivings anymore that he once had, because he recognizes that because Colorado is putting in strong regulations to protect kids, those fears are quelled. He is now in support of how Colorado has been operating.

New Jersey can also regulate marijuana smartly. And I wholeheartedly agree with the others who say that it would be a disservice and disingenuous to build a legalized industry while black and brown people sit in jail; wholeheartedly agree with that. So we need to let them out.

And we cannot stand for building an industry without giving economic opportunities to black and brown communities. But we also need to recognize that we're not just talking about growing and selling marijuana here. There is a wealth of economic opportunity that is available in legalized cannabis states. Everything from construction, to providing lighting, to providing technological equipment, to providing security and cybersecurity -- all of these areas are industries that black and brown people can fill. That's why we need legalization that gives a real chance for New Jerseyans to get jobs and own businesses. It shouldn't cost \$20,000 to get a license, because many black and brown people can't afford that.

Now, Senator Rice, I know you are a big advocate of looking at what is foreseeable. And I agree with you; and what is foreseeable is that decriminalization does not achieve the racial and social justice goals of the members of the Black Caucus, or other legislators, or advocates.

Decriminalization does not create jobs for our people, or to provide for themselves or for their families. It doesn't generate revenue to fund some of our much-needed reentry education, adult education, job

training, and drug treatment programs. And it is foreseeable that decriminalization will lead to the arrest of poor people who cannot pay fines and fees. We know that's foreseeable, because that's what's happening right now in New York.

So decriminalization really is just another form of gradualism. And communities of color are all too familiar with gradualism; they're told to, "Slow down; you'll get your jobs *later*. We'll address the harms that we afflicted on your communities *later*. We'll give you justice *later*."

But the people in New Jersey have suffered enough, and we need justice and real justice -- full justice now.

Senator Rice, you and Senator Cryan have contended that we can take social justice out of the legalization debate; but we can't. This war was created to target black and brown people, and we cannot end this war without accounting for real justice for those black and brown people.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: We need to move another car. It's a purple or maroon Lincoln; a big car -- with temporary plates.

Let me just say, before the next speaker comes up, that I always say follow the money. The ACLU has always been liberals; but far beyond liberals, so no one knows who -- where all their funding comes from.

But I can tell you this: George Soros has really sponsored, over the years, for these issues -- over \$50 million, \$100 million. I know the Carnegie Foundation and others -- Ford Foundation -- support these issues, and for different reasons. I get that, and we're not going to debate it. But I always said to our people, "Follow the money; do your own homework and research." I think that that's very, very important.

Also, it was mentioned that the sky has not fallen in Colorado. That's not really true. And there are indications that the known drug cartels are moving where they were doing -- illegal marijuana was sent to Colorado and California -- places like that; they have actually come in and got their licenses and set the weed companies up. And now they're using them for the black market; legally growing it. There is indication now that we have to be very careful about it, because we are a very integrated state -- that human trafficking may be taking place because the cartels are moving in.

Whether it's true or not, we need to find out; that's all we're saying. So I just want to mention that.

Next speaker, please.

MS. HOUENOU: And just to respond, because you talked about the funding of my organization.

We are also funded, in large part, due to individual donors; everyday New Jerseyans who believe in our causes.

SENATOR RICE: Yes; about \$12 million of that.

MS. HOUENOU: Yes, absolutely.

SENATOR RICE: Yes, we know where the money comes from; follow the money.

Go ahead.

**LEO BRIDGEWATER, Sr.:** Good afternoon, Senator Rice, members of the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus.

My name is Leo Bridgewater; I am the Co-Founder of the New Jersey Cannabis Commission. I am also the New York and New Jersey Chapter President for Minorities for Medical Marijuana; and I am one of

three veterans who testified in Senate Committee to have post-traumatic stress disorder added to the State's medical marijuana program; a Committee at which you actually served--

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: And it was added to that; the Governor added to that.

MR. BRIDGEWATER: I apologize for my tardiness; because I just came from that meeting. About 60 days ago, I stood on stage with Governor Phil Murphy as he signed his Executive Order to overhaul and expand the New Jersey Medical Marijuana program. A few hours ago, the Governor just announced those recommendations, as far as changes and expansions in terms of now anxiety, Tourette's syndrome, and-- I'm sorry; I'm just drawing a brain fart here, but there were a number of things.

Also, the current six dispensaries that are operating in the state -- five operating, six licenses -- they can immediately apply for a waiver so that they can have satellite locations throughout the state.

As you alluded to earlier, this train has already left the building. I have travelled up, and down, and across the State of New Jersey, educating about the impact of cannabis legalization. I can tell you from my experiences that the formal education of the average New Jerseyan is grossly below basic. We are much further in this conversation than most people realize. If I were to sum this up as a TV series -- if the cannabis legalization effort in New Jersey was a TV series -- we are on Season 8, Episode 3. You guys are on Season 1, Episode 4.

And spoiler alert: It's not a gateway drug. I understand -- I heard a gentleman earlier speak to that, and he said that he crashed into a

car because he smoked Acapulco gold. How do you know that? There's no way of knowing that.

Our New Jersey medical marijuana program was the bane of Governor Chris Christie's existence because he inherited this. And the way it was treated is indicative of that. In fact, part of the expansion that -- the overhaul that the Governor is recommending also eliminates -- it cuts down -- it reduces the access of cost. So it went from \$300 to now-- No; \$200 to now \$100; and if you're a veteran or senior citizen -- who happens to be the fastest-growing demographic within the cannabis space is the elderly -- it now only costs you \$20.

Again, I'm bringing these up just to highlight just how advanced in this conversation, as a state, we really are. And also to highlight how absent from this conversation as a people we have been.

And you have to understand the difference between *legislatively legalizing cannabis* versus this being a *ballot referendum*. Something that Virgil Grant, who was speaking earlier, cannot speak to, because California did not legislatively legalize cannabis. There's only one other state that has actually done it, which is Vermont. What legislatively legalizing cannabis does for our people -- because this industry has not been kind to black and brown people; they only see us as consumers; that is the real life history of the cannabis industry. But what this does here in New Jersey -- it puts us in a much more powerful position that we could actually legislate and mandate that type of minority inclusion to which some of us have alluded to earlier.

We are not too late; we're just very late. But we're close to being too late.

Thank you.

SENATOR RICE: And thank you very much.

And just for the record -- we're closing, but I want to say this, and we'll try to make this very clear, as a Caucus and individuals.

There's a difference between the legalization of medical marijuana, and the intent of it and how it is controlled; and recreational marijuana. And we can't mix the two; but folks keep trying to focus on one side in order to get rec in. And so that needs to be clear, number one.

Number two, I'm not sure where all this is going, because the first hearing that we had-- And by the way, the Governor's press conference today was about medical, because medical is legal in New Jersey, and we have to fix it. And so when you raise the questions about the number of people who are for and against marijuana legalization or recreational in New Jersey, the majority is against it. And that's why the Legislature says it won't do a referendum, because the people will not support it. If you talk about medical -- which you were talking about -- there's regular support for it, because it can be controlled. So I think that's very important to note.

And for the record -- I hope this is only coincidental; I'll find out when we go to Atlantic City -- is that at the first hearing we had, in Jersey City, Hudson County, because of the Governor's position, and the money people who supports this out there, the same day that we had the hearing he did the signing of a bill for, I think, one of the women's bills; Planned Parenthood, I think it was, okay? And today, even though I know it's been going out for the last two or three months, he decided to have a press conference while we were having this here.

Now, I'm going to assume -- because I support my Governor; we disagree on the marijuana piece -- that that is coincidental. When I get

to Atlantic City, I will find out whether or not it is coincidental; because three strokes, you're out, okay? So I just want you to be aware of that, Assemblyman. And I will tell the body if that's the case; I'm hoping it's coincidental.

So with that being said, I'm going to let Assemblyman Holley close us out.

I want to thank all of you for staying, I really do; the speakers who travelled in and left and those who waited. I definitely want to thank, more than enough, Reverend Britt, who opened his house up to us.

And we are going to agree and disagree. But I think if people get both sides of the argument, they can think for themselves, and maybe they should vote on it.

ASSEMBLYMAN HOLLEY: Thank you, Senator.

Let's give the Senator a round of applause as well (applause) for taking on this role for all of us.

Please join us downstairs for some sandwiches, some lunch, some salads.

I want to, again, thank you all for-- Everyone's telling me that Reverend Britt -- I got Reverend Britt, I got reverend Britt. (laughter) I know we are in the house of the Lord and this is his church. So at this point, I'm just going to ask Reverend Britt to come up and close us out in prayer.

Reverend Britt.

And thank you, again for opening to us.

And someone made a mention, too, about us having a hearing in church. And let me just say that -- that's how I learned how my

ancestors and the folks who came before me organized. We organized in a church. And the Senator has said, “No, we’re not having this at community centers; no, we’re not having this at city halls, where folks would be deterred from coming. We’re going to have this in churches.”

So Reverend Britt stood up here in Union County and allowed us to be here today, and I want to thank him so much (applause) for the opportunity.

And please join us downstairs for lunch; please. All of you have stayed a long time. We don’t want you to say, “You came to a marijuana hearing, and they didn’t feed you,” right, Senator? (laughter) So we want to help feed everyone so you can get on with your day.

But again, thank you all; and I want to ask Reverend Britt to come and say a few words and close us out with prayer.

REVEREND BRITT: Let me just simply say, if I have your attention. I want to thank the Legislative Black Caucus for selecting Mount Teman A.M.E. Church for this hearing. I want to thank Mount Teman A.M.E. Church for being the pillar in the community and for understanding that the Lord requires that we do justice, love, kindness, and walk comfortably with our God. We thank God for Assemblyman Holley, Senator Rice, and their leadership, and for being partners in the justice movement.

But we are very, very pleased that they brought Trenton to this region. We want to encourage everyone to remain engaged in the whole -- all of our legislators accountable, including Governor Murphy. And don’t just wait for Trenton to come to us; we’ll go to Trenton, okay?

And I'm glad we had the pros and the cons; but I don't want us to get caught up in the paralysis of analysis. Let us always trust in the Lord with all our hearts; lean not to our own understanding, and in all our ways acknowledge that the Lord might direct our paths in the right way to go.

So now, we'll just close out in prayer.

God, we thank you for what we heard. We ask, now, that we think with your mind and with your heart; and as we prepare to leave this place, but never your presence, that you go with us and before us.

We thank you for the food that has been provided. May it be blessed with the nourishment for our bodies as we continue to engage in healthy conversation that propels us to action, and not just assessments. Let us have *your* agenda, and not *our* agenda.

So now we commend ourselves to your care.

In the name of the wonderful counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting father, the Prince of Peace.

Jesus Christ, Amen.

ALL: Amen.

**(MEETING CONCLUDED)**