

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Announces Appointments to Cannabis Regulatory Commission

11/6/2020

Senior Policy Advisor and Associate Counsel Dianna Houenou to Serve as Commission Chair and Department of Health Assistant Commissioner Jeff Brown to Serve as Executive Director


TRENTON – Governor Murphy today announced his appointments of Dianna Houenou as Chair of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission, and Jeff Brown will serve as Executive Director of the Commission. The Governor will also appoint Krista Nash as a member of the Commission, upon the recommendation of Senate President Steve Sweeney.


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"Dianna has been a critical voice for social justice and equity on my team for the past year and a half after several years working on the fight to legalize marijuana with the ACLU," said Governor Murphy. "Her commitment to doing what is right and to leaving no one behind has powered our criminal justice reform agenda, and I am immensely proud that she will be continuing that commitment as Chair of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission. Since day one, we have said that the legalization of recreational marijuana must prioritize the communities marginalized and decimated by the failed War on Drugs. I know that Dianna is the perfect person to lead our effort to create a marketplace for recreational marijuana that is equitable, fair, and inclusive of all communities."

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"Jeff's leadership overseeing the state's Medicinal Marijuana program has contributed greatly to our efforts to expand access to those who need it," continued Governor Murphy. "He will bring the same integrity, care, and expertise that have led to the success of our Medicinal Marijuana program to his new role as Executive Director of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission, where he will play a key role in establishing our recreational marijuana marketplace."

"These are excellent appointments who will help ensure the success and integrity of the new cannabis industry in New Jersey," said Senate President Steve Sweeney. "Once we have the commission in place, we can move forward with the legalization process that will deliver social justice reforms and create a new business sector that offers economic opportunities. The commission will have the responsibility of creating the organizational and regulatory system to oversee the safe use of cannabis products by adults. They will play an important role in guiding New Jersey's leadership role in the reform process."

"I am incredibly humbled and honored to have been chosen by Governor Murphy for this important position. New Jerseyans have long supported expansions of the medicinal cannabis program and now have raised their voices in support of legalized personal use for adults," said Dianna Houenou, incoming Chair of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission. "Governor Murphy has been steadfast in his commitment to promoting equity and social justice in the cannabis market, and I am especially grateful for the opportunity to put those values to work as part of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission. From promoting inclusion in the permit holders to making affirmative investments in the future of our communities of color, New Jersey is poised to mark its position as a leader in advancing racial and social justice. The opportunities for equity that lay ahead are limitless, and I look forward to seizing them for the benefit of New Jersey's communities that have been disproportionately harmed by failed past policies."

"New Jersey voters have said definitively that they are ready to end cannabis prohibition," said Jeff Brown, incoming Executive Director of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission. "I am beyond honored to accept this role and to be able play a key role in enacting the will of those voters, and commit to doing so in a way that is safe, equitable, fair, and ensures that our medical cannabis patients always have the access they need."

"I am humbled and excited to serve on this very important commission," said Krista Nash, an incoming member of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission. "I thank Senate President Sweeney for this opportunity. I look forward to bringing my education and experience as a social worker to the table in order to provide thoughtful input during this process to benefit the residents of New Jersey."

The Cannabis Regulatory Commission, once fully constituted, will both regulate New Jersey's medical marijuana marketplace and will now also provide oversight to the soon-to-be-established recreational marijuana marketplace.

Dianna Houenou currently serves as Senior Policy Advisor and Associate Counsel to the Governor, advising on policy issues concerning criminal justice, military and veterans, community affairs, and immigrants' rights matters. Since joining the Governor's Office in March 2019, she has been heavily involved in the establishment of New Jersey's Office of New Americans and advancing the Administration's criminal justice priorities, including expungement reform and working to advance meaningful civilian oversight of law enforcement.

Prior to joining the Governor's Office, Dianna was Policy Counsel with the American Civil Liberties Union of New Jersey (ACLU-NJ), where she developed legislative strategies for ACLU-NJ advocacy campaigns and led the organization's coalitions advocating for marijuana legalization and Newark police reform. Evidence of her work with the ACLU-NJ can be found all across New Jersey: from the establishment of fair and welcoming policies in local towns and State government to the restoration of voting rights for residents on probation and parole, and from the passage of a law requiring the Attorney General to investigate police-involved deaths to New Jersey's path towards legalizing cannabis for adults with a focus on social justice.

As a cannabis legalization advocate, Dianna crisscrossed the state to educate the public and lawmakers on the importance of legalization. She comes to the Cannabis Regulatory Commission with substantial experience building broad-based coalitions and engagement with like-minded advocates demanding that racial and social justice remain at the forefront of New Jersey's legalization efforts.

A resident of Trenton, Dianna received a Bachelor's Degree from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. She holds a J.D. from the University of North Carolina School of Law.

Jeff Brown currently serves as Assistant Commissioner at the New Jersey Department of Health, overseeing the Division of Medicinal Marijuana. Under his leadership the Division of Marijuana has expanded access to patients

Jeff grew up in Mercer County and graduated Summa Cum Laude from Rutgers University. He is active in the community and serves on the advisory board of the New Jersey Chapter of the New Leaders Council.

Prior to working at the Department of Health, Jeff has worked extensively on the passage and implementation of the Affordable Care Act, particularly the creation of health insurance exchanges and the expansion of Medicaid, has led an association of community-based providers to implement innovative new payment models in Medicaid, and has fought to expand access to healthcare in New Jersey's urban communities by developing sustainable financing policies.

Jeff grew up in Mercer County and graduated Summa Cum Laude from Rutgers University. He is active in the community and serves on the advisory board of the New Jersey Chapter of the New Leaders Council.

Krista Nash is a long-time social justice advocate. She currently serves as Program Director of the PROMISE program at Volunteers of America Delaware Valley. She previously served as a mentor at Oaks Integrate Care and Transitions for Youth. Additionally she serves on the Camden County Addiction Awareness Task Force.

She earned a Bachelor's Degree from Rutgers University – Camden. She also holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania.


Krista and her husband Jeff reside in Cherry Hill with their three children.

"Governor Murphy has made an astute choice by naming Dianna Houenou as chair of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission. We are optimistic that Dianna's leadership and knowledge of the issues will position New Jersey to implement marijuana regulation and reforms with equity and racial justice from the start," said **Amol Sinha, Executive Director of ACLU-NJ**. "Dianna's experience in civil rights advocacy at the ACLU-NJ, policymaking, and implementing executive branch priorities gives her insights into cannabis regulation and the stakeholder table. We are confident that she will use that knowledge to help guide New Jersey's implementation of adult-use marijuana legalization. We look forward to collaborating with her to implement cannabis policy that furthers equity and social justice throughout our state."


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"Dianna is friend to the Black community and the justice community at large," said **Reverend Dr. Charles F. Cover, Director of Salvation and Justice and Pastor of the Bethel A.M.E. Woodbury Church**. "I am encouraged by her appointment as it signals the Governor's commitment to racial justice regarding cannabis."

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Governor Phil Murphy

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