



## **Cannabis Control Board Holds First Meeting**

### *Board Appoints Chief Equity Officer and Announces Medical Cannabis Program Expansion*

Albany, NY – The five-member Cannabis Control Board held its first meeting today in Albany. The meeting was attended virtually by the public and focused on key administrative tasks that the Board needed to address as it begins its work of overseeing the licensing of cannabis businesses and the approval of actions taken by the Office of Cannabis Management (OCM).

Initial actions taken by the Board included the appointing of senior staff and Jason Starr as the Chief Equity Officer. As the Chief Equity Officer, Starr is charged with establishing a robust social and economic equity program to prioritize the licensing of members of communities disproportionately impacted by the War on Drugs, paving the way for their participation in the new cannabis industry.

“Mr. Starr brings a decade of experience as an attorney, educator, organizer, and advocate to the OCM, and he has the knowledge and expertise needed to ensure equity and justice are infused in the fabric of this new agency and the industry it is constructing,” **said Board Chair Tremaine Wright.** “With these leadership posts filled following the Governor’s and Legislature’s swift action, we are moving full speed ahead with establishing an inclusive cannabis industry that operates safely, promotes public health, and repairs the harms of the past.”

Mr. Starr previously worked as the Director of the Long Island Chapter of the New York Civil Liberties Union and served as an Assistant Counsel for Civil Rights in the Executive Chamber where he spearheaded various criminal justice initiatives, including the 2019 cannabis decriminalization statute. Mr. Starr most recently worked as the Director of Litigation for the Human Rights Campaign, the nation’s largest LGBTQ+ civil rights organization, where he challenged discriminatory state and federal laws targeting the LGBTQ+ community.

The Board also approved the senior staff team that will spearhead the launch of the newly created OCM. These key hires include the team leads for operations, legal, communications, external affairs, and administration.

In addition, the Board discussed the ongoing implementation of key provisions of the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) and made the following immediate changes to the Medical Cannabis Program:

- Expanding the types of eligible clinical providers able to certify patients to any practitioner who is licensed to prescribe controlled substances in New York State, including dentists, podiatrists, and midwives.

- Increasing the amount of approved medical cannabis that may be dispensed to a certified patient or designated caregiver from a thirty (30) day supply to a sixty (60) day supply.
- Permanently waiving the patient and caregiver \$50 registration fee.
- Streamlining the approval for facilities such as hospitals, residential facilities, and schools to become designated caregiver facilities to hold and dispense products for patients.

“I am excited to announce the work being done by the Office in coordination with the Department of Health to expand access to the Medical Cannabis Program, building upon lessons learned in other states with the ultimate goal of making medical cannabis accessible to all those who may clinically benefit from it,” **said Board Chair Tremaine Wright.** “These changes will assist certified patients and designated caregivers to acquire and administer approved medical cannabis products. They represent the first of many changes to come for the State’s Medical Cannabis Program as a result of the passage of the MRTA.”

The OCM has also released guidance allowing existing Registered Organizations to begin selling whole flower to certified patients as soon as those products are approved by the State’s quality assurance testing to ensure product quality and safety. Whole flower cannabis products, which require minimal processing, offer a lower cost alternative for patients.

“Today is a great day for New Yorkers who have been waiting for a Medical Cannabis Program that meets the needs of patients everywhere. Adding Whole Flower products to the list of options will be a game changer for thousands who struggle to find relief. The list of changes to the program negotiated earlier this year in the MRTA, expanding providers, conditions, access to product among others are long overdue. Thank you to Gov. Hochul for her swift action and the new Office of Cannabis Management, led by Chris Alexander and the Cannabis Control Board, led by Tremaine Wright.” **Said Compassionate Care Act Sponsor Senator Diane Savino.**

"Sale of whole flower is an important step toward patient access to and affordability of medical cannabis," **said Assembly Health Committee Chair and Compassionate Care Act Sponsor Richard Gottfried.** "Combined with expanding participating practitioners, allowing a 60-day supply, and removing patient registration fees, these changes will help more New Yorkers access needed medication. I commend Governor Hochul and the Office of Cannabis Management for their swift first steps towards progressive, effective medical and adult use programs."

For more information on New York's Medical Marijuana Program, visit: [https://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/medical\\_marijuana/](https://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/medical_marijuana/).

Please continue to monitor the Office of Cannabis Management’s website: <https://cannabis.ny.gov/>.

Sign-up for updates from the Office of Cannabis Management here: [https://cannabis.ny.gov/sign\\_up\\_for\\_updates\\_from\\_OCM](https://cannabis.ny.gov/sign_up_for_updates_from_OCM)