



<http://thealt.com>

NEWS

# State legislators and advocates re-introduce recreational marijuana bill

Luke Stoddard Nathan | Monday, June 12 2017

<https://www.facebook.com/intsharfbw/website/state-legislators-re-introduce-recreational-marijuana-bill>



Today at 1:30 PM outside the Senate Chamber, Sen. Liz Krueger, Assemblywoman Crystal Peoples-Stokes, and a coalition of advocates will present the latest iteration (<http://www.drugpolicy.org/news/2017/06/new-york-state-legislators-renew-push-marijuana-legalization>) of the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA), which would legalize, tax, and regulate adult recreational use of the popular drug.

Along with the District of Columbia, eight states—including Maine and Massachusetts, which passed referendums last fall—have enacted measures of this type. The chance for New York to be first on marijuana legalization, an [increasingly popular proposition](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/12/support-for-marijuana-legalization-continues-to-rise/) (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/12/support-for-marijuana-legalization-continues-to-rise/>), has long passed, but one of the bill’s sponsors says this delay has essentially allowed the state to learn from other states’ experiences and borrow best practices.

“I really think this bill is the gold standard at this point in this country of what a tax-and-regulate model could and should be,” Sen. Krueger told *The Alt* on Friday. The legislation would entail the creation of “a micro-license structure, similar to New York’s rapidly growing craft wine and beer industry, that allows small-scale production and sale,” according to a press release.

These licenses would be available to people with prior drug convictions, part of a suite of provisions aimed at addressing the longstanding, disproportionate impact drug law enforcement has had on communities of color. According to a Drug Policy Alliance [fact sheet](http://smart-ny.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/StartSMART_DPA_NY_Needs_Tax_Regulate_Marijuana_6.4.2017.pdf) ([http://smart-ny.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/StartSMART\\_DPA\\_NY\\_Needs\\_Tax\\_Regulate\\_Marijuana\\_6.4.2017.pdf](http://smart-ny.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/StartSMART_DPA_NY_Needs_Tax_Regulate_Marijuana_6.4.2017.pdf)) that cites statistics collected by the state Division of Criminal Justice Services, 85 percent of the people arrested each year in New York for marijuana possession are African-American or Latino. *The Washington Post* recently [highlighted concerns](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/battling-the-racial-roadblocks-to-joining-the-legalized-marijuana-trade/2017/06/02/7321de02-416f-11e7-9869-bac8b446820a_story.html?utm_term=.313294345e90) ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/battling-the-racial-roadblocks-to-joining-the-legalized-marijuana-trade/2017/06/02/7321de02-416f-11e7-9869-bac8b446820a\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.313294345e90](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/battling-the-racial-roadblocks-to-joining-the-legalized-marijuana-trade/2017/06/02/7321de02-416f-11e7-9869-bac8b446820a_story.html?utm_term=.313294345e90)) about the overwhelming whiteness of the nascent legal marijuana industry, which seems particularly problematic in light of how drug laws have been enforced.

“We’re no longer siloing marijuana reform as a fringe issue,” says Chris Alexander, a policy coordinator with the New York office of the Drug Policy Alliance, one of the groups supporting the bill. The coalition, which has dubbed itself [Start SMART New York](http://smart-ny.com/) (<http://smart-ny.com/>)—the acronym stands for Sensible Marijuana Access through Regulated Trade—also includes [LatinoJustice](https://twitter.com/latinojustice) (<https://twitter.com/latinojustice>), [VOCAL-NY](https://twitter.com/VOCALNYAction) (<https://twitter.com/VOCALNYAction>), the [Immigrant Defense Project](https://twitter.com/immdefense) (<https://twitter.com/immdefense>), [Cannabis Cultural Association](https://twitter.com/CannaCULTURAL) (<https://twitter.com/CannaCULTURAL>), and the New York affiliate of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws.

In addition to its potential to afford some degree of racial justice, marijuana legalization might also make sense on economic grounds. In 2013, a [study by the New York City comptroller’s office](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/NYC_RegulateMarijReport.pdf) ([https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/NYC\\_RegulateMarijReport.pdf](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/NYC_RegulateMarijReport.pdf)) projected that, under a tax-and-regulate model, the city could bring in an additional \$400 million in yearly revenue. More recently, Pennsylvania’s auditor general [suggested](http://www.newsweek.com/pennsylvania-marijuana-legalization-recreational-drug-569338) (<http://www.newsweek.com/pennsylvania-marijuana-legalization-recreational-drug-569338>) the state could mitigate some of its budgetary and employment

woes through legalization.

Legalization advocates, then, might avail themselves of any number of serious arguments, and states' continued pursuit of such reforms (<http://digital.vpr.net/post/can-vt-lawmakers-scott-administration-reach-compromise-marijuana-legalization#stream/0>)—pace Attorney General Jeff Sessions (<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/features/congress-ties-jeff-sessions-hands-on-medical-marijuana-w480509>)—lends the campaign an air of inevitability. That said, it remains to be seen, in the case of New York, if MRTA or similar legislation might pass anytime soon.

For one, when it comes to pot, Governor Andrew Cuomo hardly seems like a booster. “I support medical marijuana, I don’t support recreational marijuana,” Cuomo told reporters (<http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2017/02/cuomo-says-he-remains-opposed-to-recreational-marijuana-109436>) in February. “The flip-side argument as you know is it’s a gateway drug, and marijuana leads to other drugs and there’s a lot of proof that that’s true.”

That assertion seems debatable (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/09/29/marijuana-gateway-drug-the-simple-answer-maybe/zxuZVzEMIPNRf5Idlnx4XJ/story.html>). “The reality is the empirical evidence is clear,” Eve Waltermaurer, director of research and evaluation at SUNY New Paltz’s Benjamin Center for Public Policy Initiatives, told *The Alt*. “It’s not a gateway drug, but how politicians choose to tell the story is now up to them.” Waltermaurer is now completing a white paper on how and why marijuana got tagged with the questionable appellation.

The governor’s office did not respond to an email asking if his February comments still reflected his position on recreational marijuana. Back in late 2013, when MRTA was first introduced, a Cuomo spokesman reportedly ([\) called the bill “a non starter.”](http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2013/12/krueger-weed-bill-focuses-on-real-issues-009998?jumpEdition=)

“I think the governor has concerns; I respect those,” says Sen. Krueger, citing the governor’s evolution ([http://gothamist.com/2010/10/25/cuomo\\_not\\_a\\_fan\\_of\\_medical\\_marijuan.php](http://gothamist.com/2010/10/25/cuomo_not_a_fan_of_medical_marijuan.php)) on medical marijuana as reason to expect or hope for a similar shift on recreational use. Advocates might also have been heartened by Cuomo’s inclusion of a decriminalization measure in this year’s policy book, though it did not make it into the budget ([http://www.newyorkupstate.com/news/2017/04/nys\\_budget\\_ubers\\_in\\_ebay\\_tax\\_is\\_out\\_and\\_other\\_highlights\\_after\\_drawn-out\\_battle.html](http://www.newyorkupstate.com/news/2017/04/nys_budget_ubers_in_ebay_tax_is_out_and_other_highlights_after_drawn-out_battle.html)).

Separate and apart from MRTA and the coalition described above, a recently formed political action committee called Restrict & Regulate in NY State 2019 is now pressing for a constitutional convention (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/constitutional-convention-path-legalizing-pot-n-y-article-1.3221350>) as a means of legalizing cannabis. (We’ll vote this November ([http://gothamist.com/2017/06/06/ny\\_constitutional\\_convention.php](http://gothamist.com/2017/06/06/ny_constitutional_convention.php)) on whether or not to hold the rare event.)

It is unclear how receptive the state’s medical marijuana industry might be to recreational legalization, at least at this juncture. The medical program’s rollout, which began in early 2016 (<https://www.ny-times.com/2016/01/08/nyregion/first-medical-marijuana-dispensaries-in-new-york-are-poised-to-open.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FMarijuana%20and%20Medical%20Marijuana>), has been

somewhat slow and contentious. Four of the five current licensed distributors, citing, in part, the new market's fragility, are [suing the state Department of Health](http://www.timesunion.com/allwcm/article/State-prepares-for-new-medical-marijuana-companies-11186182.php) (<http://www.timesunion.com/allwcm/article/State-prepares-for-new-medical-marijuana-companies-11186182.php>) to block the addition of five new licensees.

The established distributors meanwhile have maintained a presence in Albany. According to *The Alt's* review of filings with the state Joint Commission on Public Ethics, the distributors spent at least \$62,000 on lobbyist compensation from March through April; their efforts appear to have largely focused on medical marijuana-related policies or legislation, with some success. Not long ago, DOH [added chronic pain](http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/new-york/2017/03/16/medical-marijuana-chronic-pain-starts/99260396/) (<http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/new-york/2017/03/16/medical-marijuana-chronic-pain-starts/99260396/>) to the list of qualifying ailments, and [PTSD seems likely to follow](http://www.timesunion.com/allwcm/article/Some-veterans-push-for-medical-marijuana-to-treat-11208741.php) (<http://www.timesunion.com/allwcm/article/Some-veterans-push-for-medical-marijuana-to-treat-11208741.php>). As of June 6, there are 1,043 registered practitioners able to prescribe the drug in New York, and more than 21,000 patients, according to [DOH's website](https://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/medical_marijuana/) ([https://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/medical\\_marijuana/](https://www.health.ny.gov/regulations/medical_marijuana/)).

Sen. Krueger told *The Alt* that there is no opposition from the medical marijuana sector to MRTA; recreational legalization would effectively expand existing vendors' universe of possibilities, she explained.

Last week, we asked all five licensees via email if they would support a legalization bill akin to MRTA; none of the three companies that responded took clear stances either way, instead only reaffirming their commitment to strengthening the existing industry.

"Vireo is a physician led company and we remain laser-focused on producing high quality medical cannabis products for New Yorkers suffering from life-threatening and debilitating diseases like cancer and ALS," wrote Vireo Health of New York CEO Ari Hoffnung, who declined further comment. In a previous career as New York City's deputy comptroller, Hoffnung led the policy team that produced the report on the potential economic impact of legalizing marijuana.

Last month, Vireo launched what is [purportedly](http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/medical-marijuana-ad-campaign-pops-city-subways-article-1.3186542) (<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/medical-marijuana-ad-campaign-pops-city-subways-article-1.3186542>) the first pro-medical marijuana advertising campaign throughout the New York City subway.

Andrew Cuomo (<http://thealt.com/tags/andrew-cuomo/>)

krueger (<http://thealt.com/tags/krueger/>)

marijuana (<http://thealt.com/tags/marijuana/>)

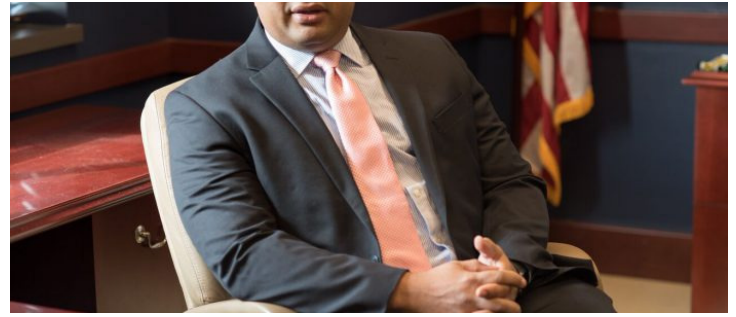
#### MORE IN NEWS





NEWS

**Fracking waste is being dumped in New York; legislators want to stop it (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/12/fracking-waste-dumped-new-york-legislators-want-stop/>)**



NEWS

**Soares looks to involve community in youth sentencing (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/08/5433/>)**



NEWS

**Protesters clash in Troy over sanctuary city status (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/05/sanctuary-city/>)**



NEWS

**Klein calls on first woman to head a legislative conference in NY to resign (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/05/klein-lashes-gillibrand-con->**



NEWS

**Troy's public housing authority pursues private funding (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/05/troys-public-housing-authority-pursues-private-fund->**

**demns-idc/)**

**ing/)**



**NEWS**

**Gillibrand's office drops hammer on IDC**  
(<http://thealt.com/2017/06/01/gillibrand-supports-mainline-senate-democrats/>)



Sign up to receive the best of The Alt delivered to your inbox each and **every** week.

**Email Address \***

name@example.com

Sign Up

---

## TOP STORIES

---

**Unapologetically beautiful: Albany in drag (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/07/unapologetically-beautiful-albany-drag/>)**

June 7 2017

---

**State legislators and advocates re-introduce recreational marijuana bill (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/12/state-legislators-advocates-re-introduce-recreational-marijuana-bill/>)**

June 12 2017

---

**Fracking waste is being dumped in New York; legislators want to stop it (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/12/fracking-waste-dumped-new-york-legislators-want-stop/>)**

June 12 2017

---

**Ghost bring pomp and pop to The Palace (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/07/5410/>)**

June 7 2017

---

**Eastbound Jesus Throws Down (Again) (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/07/eastbound-jesus-throws/>)**

June 7 2017

---

**Protesters clash in Troy over sanctuary city status (<http://thealt.com/2017/06/05/sanctuary-city/>)**

June 5 2017

---



<http://thealt.com>

PROVOKE. INFORM. INSPIRE  
THE CAPITAL REGION'S ALTERNATIVE  
NEWSWEEKLY



<http://twitter.com/thealtweekly>



<http://facebook.com/thealtweekly>

---

© 2017 The Alt. | [Privacy Policy \(http://thealt.com/privacy\)](http://thealt.com/privacy) | [Get The Alt \(http://thealt.com/distribution\)](http://thealt.com/distribution) | [Contact \(http://thealt.com/contact\)](http://thealt.com/contact) | [Street Team \(http://thealt.com/street-team\)](http://thealt.com/street-team)