

CITY OF KINGSTON

Marihuana Regulation and Taxation Act Task Force



June 2, 2023

Dear Mayor Noble and Members of the Common Council,

The City of Kingston will eventually have both adult-use cannabis retail dispensaries and on-site consumption facilities within its jurisdiction. The Marihuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) Task Force believes that once Kingston begins to receive its share of the tax revenue generated by these facilities, our City's elected officials will have a rare opportunity to reinvest new revenue—funds meant to address the documented injustices and inequity associated with cannabis prohibition—in truly innovative ways.

In addition to tax revenue, the Task Force believes that the City of Kingston should prioritize obtaining Community Grants Reinvestment Fund money to the greatest extent practicable. These funds could provide an important additional source of support for the City's equity-focused initiatives. Furthermore, the Task Force strongly believes that steps should be taken to ensure that any expenditure of cannabis tax revenue is clearly disclosed and made with full transparency. Based on our discussions and input gathered from our communities, we offer the following recommendations:

1. Considering the disproportionate impact of cannabis-related incarceration on minority and low-income communities, tax revenue should be used to promote equity by assisting individuals who were previously incarcerated on cannabis-related charges to reenter the community. Possible uses of revenue could include:
 - a. Investing in housing for previously incarcerated individuals;
 - b. Providing a stipend for individuals seeking permanent employment;
 - c. Funding reentry programs and other restorative justice initiatives; and
 - d. Funding vocational training programs.
2. Tax revenue should be used to provide public-facing information that helps Kingston residents, visitors, and businesses to navigate the changed law safely and successfully. In particular, the city should prioritize engaging with individuals directly impacted by past enforcement seeking to enter the cannabis industry. This could include:
 - a. Creating a map that clearly shows locations where cannabis sales and use are permissible, after accounting for buffer zones and other state and local laws, as well as potentially displaying local cannabis businesses;
 - b. Increasing municipal resources to answer questions about local implementation of the law, zoning issues, and opportunities within the City to participate in the cannabis industry.

- i. This could include designating a municipal liaison to serve as a point of first contact for public inquiries; and
 - c. Creating municipal signage to encourage courteous and responsible use, clearly identify locations where consumption is prohibited, discourage intoxicated driving, or otherwise promote public safety.
 - i. The City could hold contests to choose sign designs and encourage public engagement.
3. Funding additional youth programs and community programs would address the educational and childcare needs of the community while indirectly discouraging underage consumption. Those programs could include:
 - a. Funding school field trips, or providing a stipend to museums or other community cultural organizations to offer youth-focused programs;
 - b. Funding community-focused facilities or organizations, such as a skate park, a center for creative education (including music, art, or movement programs), public parks and playgrounds, and community funding sports leagues; and
 - c. Funding a free daycare program, or otherwise providing childcare support.
 - d. Special consideration should be given to making facilities and programs accessible for special needs individuals in the community.
4. Considering the chronic underfunding of mental health services, funds should be utilized to improve access to care, including the treatment of substance abuse disorders. This could include:
 - a. Financing mobile psychiatric crisis units, which would respond instead of police to a report of someone experiencing a mental health emergency;
 - b. Providing coordinated care for patients experiencing their first episode of psychosis; and
 - c. Providing additional support to suicide prevention services.
5. Providing affordable housing is a pressing need that must be addressed. In addition to supporting efforts to provide permanent housing, tax revenue generated from cannabis sales should be used to support emergency intervention measures, such as community fridges or shelters, that provide a lifeline for unhomed individuals and victims of domestic violence. These measures should also take steps to meet the healthcare needs of affected individuals, which may include supporting existing community healthcare providers such as Planned Parenthood.
6. When spending tax revenue, the City should consider how funding initiatives can promote environmental sustainability. Uses that could promote this goal might include:
 - a. Funding the conservation of green spaces and nature areas;
 - b. Improving walking infrastructure, including parks and other open spaces, such as by planting trees where appropriate or otherwise supporting green infrastructure; and
 - c. Taking steps to avoid the privatization of public property, such as using funds to acquire at-risk landmarks and ensure they remain publicly owned.
7. Investing in intra-Kingston public transportation routes, especially routes that operate on weekends, has the potential to discourage intoxicated while promoting local cannabis businesses.

8. Implementing a Kingston-based multi-use small grants program to allocate tax revenue within the community could further support community programs, events, and organizations advancing equity goals. Organizations providing services related to job placement, mental health treatment, substance use disorder treatment, and legal aid to address barriers to reentry or medical care are especially high-impact funding areas.
9. To promote ongoing public engagement and ensure that the community is kept informed of how the City is utilizing cannabis tax revenue, the City should periodically issue reports of how it has invested these funds. Reports should be published on a quarterly basis at minimum, and should include both a brief description of projects funded using cannabis tax revenue and a statement of how much funding each program received.

In conclusion, the City must ensure that tax revenue is reinvested equitably. Decades of prohibition and unjust enforcement have caused lasting harm to Kingston's communities. It is the Task Force's hope that these funds can begin to alleviate that burden. Fundamentally, the Task Force believes that the City of Kingston now has an opportunity to make a generational investment in building the kind of community where we all want to live. We therefore urge the Common Council and City of Kingston to act on these recommendations as soon as possible.

Signed,

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