

Opt-out of marijuana sales

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Nassau County residents urged legislators to ban marijuana sales if it is legalized on the state level at a public hearing on Feb. 6.

Under Gov. Andrew Cuomo's proposal to legalize pot, counties could "opt out" of allowing marijuana sales within its borders; however, use would be legal under state law, County Attorney Jared Kasschau said at the hearing.

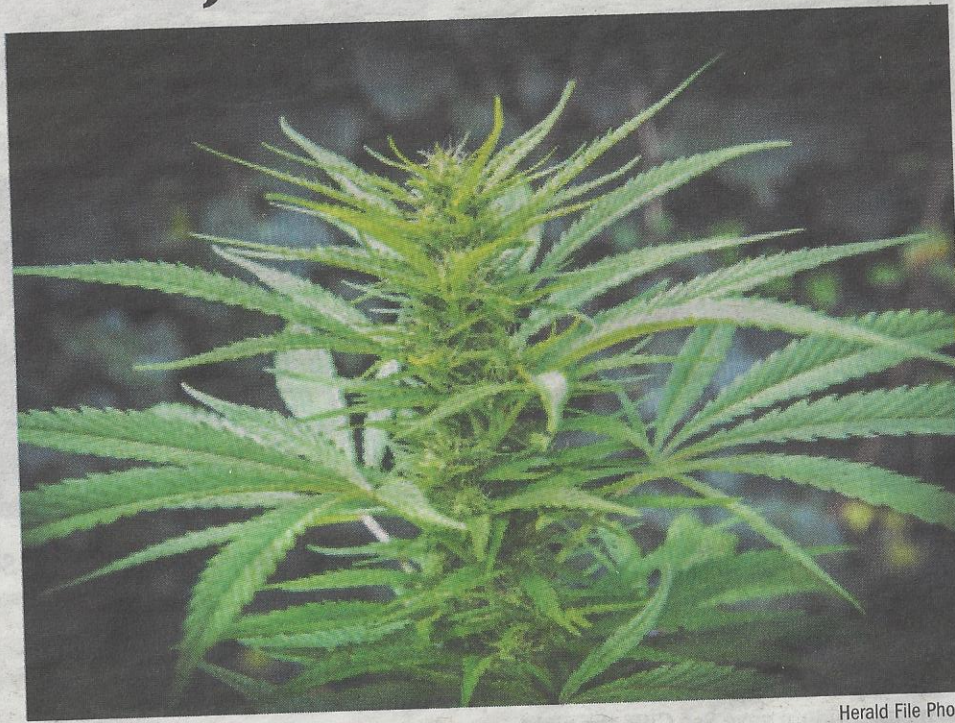
He also noted that the bill would create the Office of Cannabis Management, which would regulate all aspects of growing and selling pot products for adults 21 and older. The bill also determines where taxes from wholesale and retail gross proceeds would go — 20 percent to the state and 2 percent to the counties.

Hundreds gathered to address mounting concerns regarding the potential legalization. From worried parents to addiction recovery experts, many warned of the negative impact that they believe recreational cannabis would have on communities.

Pleading with the Nassau County Legislature to ban the sale of marijuana if the state bill passes, Brian Sullivan, president of Correction Officers Benevolent Association, cited deterioration of workplace environments, road safety and youth health, as well as increased problems in policing, as issues that would arise from legalization.

"This whole thing is a very bad idea, especially here on Long Island where we're dealing with enough nonsense with opioids and gangs," he said. "Leave this craziness to the lunatics in New York City."

Sullivan argued that any tax revenue that legalization would accrue would only be funneled into increased law enforce-



Herald File Photo

THE PLANNED LEGALIZATION of recreational marijuana was panned at a Nassau County hearing on Feb. 6.

ment initiatives and rehabilitation for users, receiving applause from the crowded room of residents. The majority who offered public comment echoed his sentiments, including parents, school and village officials, counselors and business leaders.

"The safety and well-being of our children should be paramount," said Kellenberg Memorial High School principal Chris Cartier. "I don't think that Gov. Cuomo has put much thought into this proposal."

Dr. Sharon Harris, Executive Director of SAFE Glen Cove, told the Herald Gazette that, "I think there is an ethical responsibility to use evidence-based research and practices for applications for individuals and society."

"If and when the legalization of recreational marijuana transpires," Harris added, "the community has to be alerted to potential abuse by youth. There is evidence that marijuana has harmful neurological effects and, quite clearly, behavioral effects in children and adolescents."

Two residents advocated in favor of legalization, including a representative from the Long Island Progressive Coalition who read aloud the children's book, "It's Just A Plant," and a graduate college student who argued that marijuana does not "kill brain cells." Earlier in the hearing, Sullivan stated that youth who smoke pot regularly lose IQ points that they can never regain, and that adolescents who use are less likely to finish college.

The hearing came after County Executive Laura Curran announced the creation of a marijuana task force to research the effects and methods of regulation. The team will present a report of

interview after the hearing that he believed it was premature to discuss the idea of opting out of marijuana sales. He said he wanted to wait until the task force's report was released.

Curran received her first update from the task force, also co-chaired by Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder, on Feb. 4. "We are looking at all aspects of this issue. As always, my primary concern is the health and safety of our residents — especially our children," Curran said in a statement.

The task force, Lafazan said, has several subcommittees that will address marijuana from different angles, including education, law enforcement, criminal justice and legislation. For example, the criminal justice subcommittee will examine how marijuana should be treated in the court system.

Lafazan said the passion of opponents and proponents of legalization at the hearing struck him. "I think it would be a mistake to underestimate just how much passion people have on this," he said, "whether they're pro-marijuana or anti-marijuana. People feel strongly about this issue."

The task force will be holding a listening session, where people can make suggestions on how to approach legal marijuana, at Hempstead Town Hall on March 5 at 7 p.m. Lafazan encouraged everyone to attend.

A representative from the Rockville Centre Coalition for Youth who attended the Feb. 6 hearing said that while most of the speakers were informative, more information is needed from the governor about the proposed bill.

The coalition has been outspoken in its opposition of legalizing marijuana. Members Ruthanne McCormack and Liz Boylan are in the midst of a lobbying initiative to share their concerns with legislators on the federal, state and county levels.

"Every state is being challenged by the legalization and commercialization of marijuana," Boylan said. "The prime