

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: The Cannabis Conundrum**

A recent article in The New York Times discusses Americans support of the legalization of marijuana, their political leaders disapproval and ensuing shops selling marijuana that have proliferated since the state legalized cannabis last year, thriving in confusion over their legality and a lack of enforcement.

A decade ago, no American lived in a state where marijuana was legal to smoke, vape or eat recreationally. Today, nearly half of Americans do or will soon: Voters approved legalization ballot measures this month in Maryland and Missouri, bringing the number of states allowing any adult use to 21. Legalization amounts to America's largest change to its drug policy in decades. By aligning marijuana with alcohol and tobacco, rather than harder drugs, the policy change is giving birth to a new industry. And, over time, it could reduce the hundreds of thousands of marijuana arrests made in the U.S. every year, freeing up police resources.

The change came about largely because of the support of voters, not politicians or lawmakers. While the public backs legalization, some prominent political leaders do not: President Biden has said he's opposed. Donald Trump has characterized legalization as an issue for states to decide, but his 2020 presidential campaign said marijuana should remain illegal. A key reason for marijuana legalization's success is due to its popularity. According to a recent Gallup survey, about 68 percent of adults in the U.S. support legalization. Twenty years ago public opinion was essentially the reverse: About 64 percent of U.S. adults said marijuana should not be legal. The shift toward support empowered legalization campaigns around the U.S. The 21 states that have legalized it have done so only since 2012, starting with Colorado and Washington. Advocates of legalization credit several issues. Much of the public now sees the broader war on drugs as a costly failure — and marijuana, widely viewed as less dangerous than alcohol, is an accessible target for policy changes. States' experiments with medical marijuana, starting in the 1990s, helped make Americans more comfortable with loosening access. And the internet has made it easier for a grass-roots legalization movement to spread.

Some leading lawmakers have not followed the shift in public opinion. President Biden has said he opposes jailing marijuana users and pardoned thousands of people convicted of marijuana possession under federal law. But he also opposes legalization, putting him at odds with his contemporaries.

Lawmakers' opposition has led activists to rely largely on voter support to enact legalization. Of the 21 states where recreational marijuana is or will soon be legal, 14 approved the change through ballot measures. There are limits to the ballot process. Not every state allows such initiatives. And the drug remains illegal at the federal level, stopping most big banks from working with marijuana businesses and raising the businesses' tax

bills. Even in states where voters approve legalization, marijuana may remain illegal.

In addition to the issues, New York City has seen a proliferation of unlicensed marijuana retail shops since the legalization of marijuana. In recent months, several more smoke shops and dispensaries have opened, illegally selling cannabis products to tourists, city dwellers and commuters over the past year and viewed as part of a rush to cash in on the state's legalization of cannabis before the rules could be set. Now on the eve of the launch of the state's legal market, the authorities face growing pressure to address the shops, which have created confusion among everyone from tourists to police officers.

State regulators and some industry insiders have called for the shops to be shut down for fear they undermine the legal market. But supporters of the shops say they are employing people and serving a clientele left waiting for legal retail locations that have been slow to launch. New York legalized cannabis for adult recreational use last year in March.

Without a significant change in the landscape, licensed cannabis retailers will be forced into competition with unlicensed sellers who already have a foothold in the market and can offer lower prices because they do not pay cannabis sales taxes or comply with state regulations.

State cannabis regulators issued the first retail licenses on Monday, allowing 36 businesses and nonprofits to open dispensaries serving adults 21 and older. State officials have said they hope to have the first retail sales underway by the end of the year. Since legalization, cannabis shops have surfaced nearly everywhere: two blocks from a police precinct station house in Long Island City, across an intersection from a middle school in Harlem and on top of a subway station in Williamsburg, for example.

Regulators said they were tracking the shops across the state, but refused to estimate how many exist. Industry observers say they appear to number in the hundreds.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is concerned about marijuana use and its consequences on the health and development of youth. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE's website to learn more about marijuana use at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).

