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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Gov. Kathy Hochul On Unlicensed Cannabis Shops**

A recent article in the New York Times discussed Governor Hochul's recent proposal to shut down unlicensed marijuana shops that have greatly increased in the wake of the legalization of recreational cannabis.

There are more than 400 illicit weed shops in Manhattan alone, far surpassing the few dozen licensed cannabis retailers in the entire state. Licensed dispensary owners maintain the legal market could not compete with the cut-rate prices in illicit shops. The governor and business owners also called on search engines and social media companies like Google and Yelp to remove content about unlicensed shops, which they said added to the confusion among consumers about what cannabis shops were licensed and which were not.

The governor said that the illicit shops posed a public health hazard and undermined the state's effort to build a cannabis industry that could provide opportunities for people harmed by the war on drugs and that efforts to deter the stores with raids and fines over the last year had been concentrated in the hands of too few agencies and had not been effective. Her proposal would make it easier for the state's Office of Cannabis Management to obtain court orders to padlock stores and would allow for the orders to be executed by local agencies that had more personnel.

New York legalized cannabis in 2021, prompting a rush by people trying to cash in before regulators could set the rules and hand out licenses. Despite hundreds of raids over the last year, smoke shops have proliferated, selling cannabis to consumers who are often underage or unaware that the negative consequences.

Last year, the Legislature gave state cannabis regulators and the tax authorities greater power to go after unlicensed retailers. The city and the Manhattan district attorney also sent warning letters to the landlords of more than 400 shops, but only 15 of the shops have been evicted. Overall, few shops have been penalized or closed. The Office of Cannabis Management said it had assessed \$25 million in fines, but the agency has collected only \$22,500 as retailers have fought the fines in administrative hearings that go on for months, a development that was first reported by The City. Licensed retailers have called for the state to take action against social media companies and search engines that they accuse of driving unsuspecting consumers to unlicensed shops. Those same sites, the retailers say, have removed listings that belonged to licensed dispensaries without any explanation.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition had the foresight to work with local government to avoid the situation transpiring in New York City necessitating the Governor to take action. In 2022, with the encouragement of the Coalition and other community members concerned about the health and safety of the community, the Glen Cove City Council voted unanimously to opt out of allowing cannabis retail dispensaries and onsite consumption locations.

Again in 2022, the Coalition's Community Committee embarked on an effort to draft and propose a new law restricting incoming vape stores that sell drug paraphernalia to B2 District areas as strong and effective laws and regulations were needed to protect youth from deadly addiction by reducing access to tobacco, vaping products and other drug use. That effort came to successful fruition in 2023 at the City Council meeting whereby the proposed law was passed unanimously.

The Coalition has always advocated for the health and wellness of the Glen Cove community and has worked hand in hand with the Mayor and City Council to implement sustainable environmental strategies that supports and maintains a healthy environment for residents.

The New York Times is an American newspaper based in New York City with worldwide influence and readership. For more information, please visit [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

SAFE is the only alcohol and substance use prevention agency in Glen Cove whose mission is to eliminate alcohol and substance use in Glen Cove. It's Coalition is concerned about cannabis use- especially in youth as their brains are developing. The Coalition is conducting a prevention awareness campaign entitled "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE; Underage Marijuana Use," to educate and update the community regarding marijuana use and its negative consequences. 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 Cannabis/Marijuana use at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).