



NEW JERSEY SENATE

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Governor Phil Murphy
Governor's Office
225 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney
Office of the Senate President
125 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin
Office of the Assembly Speaker
125 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy, Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Coughlin:

I'm writing to appeal to your common sense and your commitment to the welfare of our state with a firm request that the so-called "anticipated revenues" from recreational marijuana be removed from the proposed budget. Considering the stakes involved in this dangerous attempt to legalize recreational marijuana, and the harm such legislation will do to people and communities, inclusion of this anticipated **\$60 million** drug money in our upcoming state budget is irresponsible and insulting to the good people we represent.

As a decades-long public servant with a demonstrated dedication to the welfare of New Jersey as a whole and the vibrancy and health of its cities in particular, I join the majority of informed taxpayers and voters who realize that it is offensive and wrong to anticipate revenues from the proposed enactment of recreational marijuana legislation that we know, if passed into law, has a powerful potential to do mental, physical, economic and judicial harm to residents in New Jersey. Most at risk are our people of color, our disadvantaged, our urban communities and the suburban neighborhoods they border.

For a glimpse into our fiscal future, we can review last year's state budget where the governor anticipated \$20 million in revenue from medical marijuana. In reality, the Office of Legislative Services now reports that the total amount of actual revenue raised is about \$8.2 million (including \$1.5m from patient and caregiver registrations and \$6.7 million from sales tax). This was an overestimation of \$11.8 million based on wishful thinking.

Today, as many of my legislative colleagues rush headlong to pass Senator Scutari's recreational marijuana bill, we find our thinking clouded once again by the prospect of imagined revenues. No one wants to admit that the underlying motivator is money. Senator Scutari and several legislators are pushing the bill under the guise of it being a remedy to the social injustice perpetrated on black and brown people caught up in discriminatory drug arrests and an unfair judicial system. But let's be real: This is about money for wealthy investors and political friends. This is about filling the state coffers with a revenue source that puts minorities in further legal jeopardy. Social justice can only be addressed with legislation written specifically to mandate judicial reform.

You are each well aware that the majority members of the legislature do not want to vote to legalize recreational marijuana in this state. Despite your Herculean attempts to apply pressure and to enlist celebrities for invasive phone calls and tweets to legislators, you have not garnered the votes you need to bring the recreational marijuana bill to the Senate floor for a vote. In contrast, the governor and the legislative leadership have managed to alienate some members by assuming they would become "star struck" and somehow capitulate their thinking when contacted by people like Whoopi Goldberg and Al Sharpton. I assure you, clear-eyed legislators with the well-being of their constituents at heart would not be swayed by media icons to voice anything different than the sentiments and concerns they've already expressed to their respected colleagues in the Assembly or Senate.

I entreat you to be honest with our citizens about your objectives. This is about money. Now, there's nothing wrong with raising money; New Jersey needs to fund the thousands of programs and services that help our residents. But we can raise that money in a way that truly does relieve social injustice in our state. We can raise revenue by decriminalizing recreational marijuana use – thereby saving \$140 million in judicial and incarceration costs.

Such resolve on the part of my fellow legislators would convince the public and those neighborhoods that would otherwise be most endangered by recreational marijuana bodegas that we do care about social justice. It would bring integrity to the process.

With all respect, I add another essential request to lessen the affront to the sensibility of a majority of legislators who see no logical advantage to melding the legalization of recreational marijuana legalization, the expungement bill and the medical marijuana bill into one colossal issue. Each piece of legislation is complex in itself and worthy of its

own separate vote. I suspect that tie-barring the recreational marijuana bill to the others is an attempt to disguise what's really at stake and serves as a decoy away from problematic threats the bill poses to the security of our state and its people.

In addition, the tie-bar, in effect, holds legislators hostage as it relates to their ability to vote on each bill separately. There is much more going on behind the scenes than is apparent to the untrained eye. A good indication that social justice is not at the heart of the recreational marijuana bill is the Senate president's own recent admission to the media. In a March 29, 2019 Politico NJ article, Senator Sweeney stated, "An expansion of medical marijuana is just a back door way to getting to adult use"

Mr. President, legalization of recreational marijuana has not improved social justice one iota. Not in California, Colorado, Nevada, Washington State, or Washington D.C. where black people are still being arrested three times more than white people for violation of marijuana laws. Faulty projections and a false promise hold no water among African Americans who simply hear another empty echo of "40 acres and a mule."

The Politico article also reported that once the governor realized last Monday that the majority of senators would reject passage of the recreational marijuana bill, he decided to move forward with his resolve to grow the number of medical dispensaries which he believes would be bolstered by "as many as 200,000 people" joining the plan. Unfortunately, his intention to do the right thing was choked by legislative leadership. The Politico article reports "the governor had planned to move forward with the executive action after the recreational bill collapsed on Monday – also killing a measure to expand the legalization of recreational marijuana program – but he decided to hold off at the request of lawmakers."

I feel it's my responsibility as a New Jersey senator to clarify to the public that this "request of lawmakers" is not in the name of social justice and that the governor's delay is in the hope of satisfying economic goals for wealthy investors and political friends who would benefit from the marijuana industry at the expense of disadvantaged citizens throughout our state.

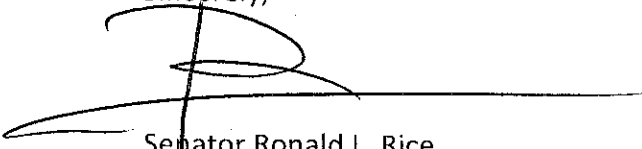
Finally, I want to point out that the legislative gyrations we are witnessing are much more than a futile attempt to force a square peg into round hole. This travesty is delaying and preventing access to medical marijuana for those who need it most and need it now. The Politico article reports that the governor "said he can achieve some of the same goals of the medical through unilateral action." The public in our state recognizes the convoluted strategy of trying to force legislators to vote for legalizing recreational marijuana by tying that bill to the medical marijuana expansion, and it opposes the resulting jeopardy to patients unable to obtain treatment.

I implore each of you gentlemen to take a breath and see how far we have come from the goal of strengthening our state in every way possible and enriching and empowering

the lives of our citizens. We are barreling along a collision course where revenues are imagined, social injustice is perpetuated, residents are at risk, and the health and treatment of patients is secondary to the goal of finding an easy fix for the state budget.

We're better than this and we can work together for common sense legislation that serves all New Jerseyans. Let's put New Jersey residents before investors!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Rice', written over a horizontal line.

Senator Ronald L. Rice
28th Legislative District