



For Immediate Release
March 20, 2019

Contact: Lauren Greene
lgreene@nharbor.com
401-831-1200

RI Cities and Towns Opposes Legalization of Marijuana without Sufficient Local Controls

League's members expect marijuana facility siting and sales to be local decisions

PROVIDENCE – The League of Cities and Towns announced its opposition to the current proposal for the legalization of marijuana, Article 20 of Gov. Raimondo's FY 2020 budget. The current proposal, does not take into consideration the large-scale, far-reaching impacts that legalization would have on cities and towns. Municipalities will bear the vast majority of burdens including public safety, traffic and congestion, and complaints about nuisance properties. However, the proposal does not afford municipalities appropriate local control over which businesses and facilities would be allowed in their communities. In addition, the proposed revenues will not be sufficient to address the new costs for cities and towns.

"Marijuana legalization will have health, public safety and workforce impacts in our cities and towns," **said Brian Daniels, Executive Director of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns.** "What our mayors, town managers and councilmembers have heard from their counterparts in other states is that, if Rhode Island legalizes marijuana, our cities and towns will bear most of the direct burden. While the Governor's proposal envisions regulation and licensing at the state level, our communities will need to deal with most of the problems and public concerns. A top-down model will not work when local officials are bearing the burden and the cost."

In the current proposal, a community could prohibit marijuana-related businesses only temporarily, and would need to conduct a local public referendum in November 2020 to enact a longer-term ban. This approach is in contrast to the way in which communities decide upon alcohol sales or adult entertainment, which is through local zoning and licensing. Instead, the League firmly believes communities should be able regulate recreational marijuana businesses by ordinance or through an opt-in referendum, requiring an affirmative vote from the public before approving any new businesses. The Governor's current proposal also prohibits local sales taxes and community host agreements, which are permitted in Massachusetts and provide appropriate local resources and operational control over marijuana businesses.

“We urge the Administration and the General Assembly to heed the concerns of municipal officials on marijuana legalization,” **said Daniels**. “The decision about where to locate facilities and retail stores is a local one – requiring possible zoning changes to protect public health and safety. Our thirty-nine members may differ on whether they want marijuana facilities and sales in their individual communities, but they are united in their belief that it should be a local decision.”

Founded in 1968, the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns is a municipal membership organization that serves as the unified voice of local government in Rhode Island.

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