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Auditor General DePasquale Says Pennsylvania Cannot Afford to Lose Out on Marijuana Legalization Benefits
Support for legalization continues to climb as more states seriously consider legal weed

HARRISBURG – Auditor General Eugene DePasquale today said Pennsylvania cannot afford to lose out on economic and social benefits from marijuana legalization as public support grows and more states allow possession of small amounts for personal use.

"Across the U.S., additional states are having serious conversations about the legalization of marijuana," DePasquale said at a marijuana legalization rally in the Capitol sponsored by NORML, the ACLU-PA and the Keystone Cannabis Coalition. "Just yesterday, Vermont's governor signed legislation legalizing marijuana, and Pennsylvania's neighbor to the east – New Jersey — has a new governor who has said that he would push for legalization of marijuana in his state.

"An overwhelming majority of Americans now favor marijuana legalization, and I would hate to see Pennsylvania lose out on a revenue stream and the social benefits that would be provided by moving away from the 'Reefer Madness' mindset," he said.

"This is probably the most significant issues I have seen where the public and the voters are so far ahead of the politicians," DePasquale said, noting that Gallup Polling reports 64 percent of Americans are now in favor of legalizing marijuana for personal use. "Legalization of marijuana in Pennsylvania is going to happen, but we must hold our elected officials accountable.

"Change is already happening on the local level," DePasquale said. "Just last week, Erie City Council voted to decriminalize small amounts of marijuana. Erie now joins Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, State College and York in realizing that decriminalizing marijuana is just common sense."

DePasquale said recently that, in Kentucky, a leading Republican state senator introduced legislation to legalize marijuana.

"When you have a Republican politician from a very conservative state pushing for legalization of marijuana, then you know the train is steaming down the tracks full bore," DePasquale said. "It is time for Pennsylvania to take advantage of this opportunity."

DePasquale noted that some roadblocks to marijuana legalization remain, particularly from Washington, D.C.

"The Trump Administration – in the form of Attorney General Jeffrey Beauregard Sessions – earlier this month made the bone-headed decision to reverse a long-standing policy allowing states to legalize marijuana without repercussions from the federal government," DePasquale said.

"Our U.S. attorney general is stuck in the Dark Ages. He is using finite federal resources to fight a war against drugs that was lost decades ago. He is also shockingly tramping on state's rights."

DePasquale said regulating and taxing marijuana could:

- Pour $200 million – a conservative estimate – into Pennsylvania's state tax revenue stream at a time when budgets are strained and there is little appetite for additional taxes;
- Reduce an estimated 20,000 marijuana possession arrests annually in Pennsylvania estimated to have cost at least $47 million tax dollars in 2017 alone;
- Help prevent some people from getting addicted to prescription painkillers and entering the potentially deadly spiral of opioid addiction;
- Create thousands of good paying jobs; and
- Reduce the loss of income and other social, personal and emotional impacts on those arrested for simply possessing a small amount of marijuana.

"Other states are already taking advantage of the opportunity for massive job creation and significant savings from reduced arrests and criminal prosecutions for possession of small amounts of marijuana," DePasquale said. "The longer we wait, the more we will miss out on new business development, good-paying jobs for Pennsylvanians and tax revenues to support services for residents."

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