

# Debate over making pot legal in NYS

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The Suffolk Legislature hosted a spirited public meeting Monday night over recreational marijuana legalization, with supporters predicting a financial windfall for New York State but at least one opponent saying legal pot sellers will unfairly profit off minority communities.

Others in attendance debated whether Suffolk lawmakers should support opting out — prohibiting the recreational sale of marijuana in counties and cities with more than 100,000 residents if legislators in Albany make it legal.

Kings Park resident Kim Revere, who said she was part of an anti-drug coalition, Kings Park in the kNOW, asked that if recreational marijuana is legalized, any tax revenue generated by sales go toward prevention programs for youth and drug treatment.

“I am sure you have heard many arguments for and against legalization and commercialization of marijuana,” said “I am here to provide neither . . . That being said I am asking you to do this right.”

Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory, Legis. William Spencer, chair of the Legislature’s Health Committee, and Legis. Tom Donnelly, chair of the Public Safety Committee, held the meeting to get public input as New York State stands poised to legalize the use of recreational marijuana. Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo has expressed his support for legalization and Albany legislators could vote on a related bill this year.

Gregory conducted the two-hour debate, which drew as many as 48 speakers and was peppered with splashes of applause — the loudest of which came from the pro-legalization sectors of the hall.

About 200 people were inside the chambers and in the foyer of the legislative building for the meeting.

Small-business owner Mike Como said the county can’t af-

ford to miss out on the tax revenue anticipated by legalization.

“There is a great deal of tax revenue that can be generated,” said the owner of a swimming pool company with more than 20 employees.

The arguments for and against legalization ranged from the personal to the professional. A woman who identified herself only as Susan of Coram, told the legislators she would like Suffolk to opt out of allowing legal marijuana.

If the county does opt in, she urged lawmakers to outlaw smoking in multiple unit-dwellings so she doesn’t have to get a contact “high” from second-hand smoke.

“I’m here on behalf of all of us who want to breathe fresh air,” she said.

She followed Abu Edwards, director of state affairs for Smart Approaches to Marijuana, which also opposes legalization. Edwards cited racial disparities in the criminal justice system in states that have legalized the drug.

“To continue to legalize and commercialize marijuana is to continue to allow an addictive industry to profit off minorities and the marginalized,” he said. “It’s time for us to wake up and realize that legalizing marijuana only reinforces the pillars of racial inequality in our country.”

But Troy Smith of the Empire State NORML, an advocacy group for legalization and access to the drug, said, “I would like to urge you all to say ‘no’ — don’t opt out,” citing the potential for Suffolk to forfeit tax revenue and allow illegal suppliers to profit since people will indulge in the drug anyway.

John Durso, president of Local 338, a union that represents workers in the cannabis industry, said his members have been able to enjoy solid employment due to their jobs in a growing industry.

“We understand there are significant community concerns with legalization,” he said. “The bottom line is, we support the legalization.”



Linda Alagna, a community outreach specialist, hugs CN client Thomas Ingenito of East Meadow.

chased through a \$1.25 million grant from the state Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services that will keep the unit operating through the end of 2019.

The mobile unit, the first of its kind in Nassau, will make scheduled visits to neighborhoods struggling with high rates of addiction, including Freeport, Baldwin, Bellmore and Hempstead, and provide on-site treatment, regardless of a patient’s ability to pay or insurance status, Friedman said. While the RV will make

regular visits to shelters, soup kitchens and outside emergency rooms, appointments can also be made for the vehicle to visit private homes, officials said.

Thomas Ingenito, 23, of East Meadow, said he began abusing drugs, from crack and cocaine to heroin and Oxycontin, after the death of his mother eight years ago.

Ingenito, who works in a Hicksville warehouse, said he’s overdosed 11 times but finally got clean after serving a six-month stint in the Nassau

County Correctional Center for drug possession.

“I didn’t want to hurt people anymore,” said Ingenito, a CN client. “Too often, addicts are disregarded. People look at us like we’re not even human. But we are human beings just like everyone else.”

Fatal overdoses on Long Island fell 21 percent last year, from a high of 614 in 2017 to 483 in 2018, according to data provided by the police departments and medical examiners in Nassau and Suffolk counties.