



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

560 Jefferson Boulevard  
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886

## **Cannabis Control Commission**

### **Open Meeting Minutes**

**DATE:** Friday October 4, 2024

**TIME:** 1:00 PM

**PLACE:** Public Utilities Commission  
89 Jefferson Boulevard  
Warwick, RI 02886

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Kimberly R. Ahern, Esq.  
Commissioner Robert B. Jacquard, Esq.  
Commissioner Olayiwola Oduyingbo, Esq.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Michelle Reddish, MS, MPH, Administrator, Cannabis Office  
Mariana Ormonde, Esq., Chief of Legal Services, Cannabis Control Commission  
Kelsey McQueeney, Administrative Officer, Cannabis Control Commission  
Carla Aveledo, Esq., Legal and Policy Liaison, Cannabis Control Commission  
Madison Rivard, MPH, Public Health Epidemiologist, Cannabis Use, Substance Use Epidemiology Program, Rhode Island Department of Health

Chairperson Ahern called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm.

The first item of business was:

#### **Introductory remarks from Chairperson Ahern, which included:**

- Discussed new calendar month and its significance to Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

- Noted previous presentations and legal statutes that discuss medical cannabis that can help alleviate symptoms of Cancer treatments.
- Reviewed that meetings tend to follow the state annual calendar.
- Highlighted Rosh Hashanah.
- Acknowledged the Cannabis Advisory Board for their work on social equity.
- Acknowledged public feedback received and how that assisted in furthering data analysis.

The next item of business was:

**Motion to approve the minutes of the Open Session Meeting held on September 6, 2024.**

Upon motion made by Chair Ahern and duly seconded by Commissioner Jacquard, it was unanimously

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the open session meeting held on September 6, 2024.

The next item of business was:

**Motion to approve the minutes of the Open Session Meeting held on September 13, 2024.**

Upon motion made by Chair Ahern and duly seconded by Commissioner Oduyingbo, it was unanimously

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the open session meeting held on September 13, 2024.

The next item of business was:

**Presentation on the analysis of the required criteria in the Rhode Island Cannabis Act § 21-28.11-3(23) concerning disproportionately impacted areas as it relates to social equity applicants., which included:**

- A review of the statutory language and requirements of disproportionately impacted areas (DIA).
- Reviewed progression of research and data regarding DIAs.
- Noted the three municipalities that met at least three criteria for DIA in the preliminary data analysis, which included Central Falls, Providence and Woonsocket.

- Discussed that community feedback at both the Commission and Advisory Board level, as well as discussion from the Advisory Board, encouraged the Commission to expand upon the preliminary data.
- The next phase of data analysis looked at the statutory requirements with data sets available at a census tract level.
- The census tract data identified areas in Providence, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Pawtucket and Newport that qualified as disproportionately impacted areas with the census tract available data including poverty rate, SNAP, and unemployment rate.
- This data confirmed that areas within Central Falls, Providence and Woonsocket remained identified DIAs in both the preliminary and census tract data.
- Commissioners noted that it will take time to think about the findings..
- Chair Ahern thanked the state agencies not present that assisted with the collection of this data and cartography skills to help create the maps showing the census tracts.

The next item of business was:

**Presentation on the proposed social equity program for new adult use social equity cannabis retailers as set forth in the Rhode Island Cannabis Act, which included:**

- Reviewed social equity licensing in each zone and the definition of a social equity applicant.
- Highlighted that social equity provisions are noted in the Rhode Island Cannabis Act as a priority.
- Noted that if an applicant is not able to qualify as a social equity applicant, they may pay all required fees and proceed to seek licensure as a non-social equity applicant.
- Chair Ahern noted that the goal is to keep the application period on equal footing, as much as possible.
- Reviewed a potential operation of how to become a social equity applicant, which included a qualification phase, eligibility, review period and decision period on social equity.
- Noted that the Cannabis Act provides a statutory period required to provide alternative evidence for denials.
- Following the alternative evidence process, there will be a pool of approved social equity status applicants.
- Provided a flow chart of licensure process for social equity and retail licenses.
- Reviewed potential process for licensee selection via random selection process for all three retailer license types.
- Reviewed potential for provisional licenses for social equity applicants selected.
- Discussed parameters of the Social Equity Assistance Fund.

- Chair Ahern noted funding schemes in other states, including Vermont, and how they disperse funds and waive fees.
- Noted that there are plans to do external outreach with communities and groups, as well as further work with Statewide Planning to develop searchable maps, and continued work on technical assistance development.
- Also noted that the Commission is preparing for the APA regulatory process to open in the months ahead.

Discussion ensued amongst the Commissioners, which included:

- Noted that the social equity license could potentially be better selected by merit based processes.
- Discussed the competitive atmosphere for social equity applicants, and how applicants could show their merit through various criteria.
- Discussed the possibility of a lottery system if necessary.

The next item of business was:

**Public Comment:**

Six people provided public comment, which included:

- Expressed appreciation for the thoughtful conversation regarding social equity.
- Noted that liquor stores in Rhode Island are carrying THC/Delta 9/hemp-derived drinks.
- Expressed concerns regarding the safety of THC drinks and the cannabis market.
- Requested more retail stores be opened as soon as possible.
- Requested clarity on if applicants who make an income in a disproportionately impacted area would be considered a social equity applicant.
- Expressed discontent with the Office of Cannabis Regulation and Department of Business Regulation regarding the opening of a lottery-selected compassion center.
- Noted that cultivators are at a disadvantage in this market and need new compassion centers and retailers.
- Requested information regarding the amount of money in the Social Equity Fund and how it is funded.
- Appreciated the data and presentation on disproportionately impacted areas.
- Emphasized that the cultivators are in an unsustainable market.
- Requested the Commission provide a defined timeline to review data.
- Requested more information on worker cooperative licenses.
- Expressed the need to get social equity licensees off the ground quickly and successfully.
- Noted speed as a factor and how the Social Equity Fund can start providing grants and assistance.
- Recommended looking into national trainings that can be utilized as soon as

possible.

**Adjournment:**

- Chair Ahern noted the cross-section of topics heard within public comment and how that highlights the decisions the Commission needs to make and the different approaches in doing so.
- Chair Ahern also expressed that based on research and conversations with counterparts in other states, that hybrid selection process may be best to avoid further licensing delays.

Upon motion made by Chair Ahern and duly seconded by Commissioner Oduyingbo, it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn the meeting at 2:17 pm.

**Next Meeting Date:** September 13, 2024.