

# Increase in cannabis tax to fund police, other issues raise cannabis industry concerns over MRA's proposed law changes

*Multiple groups prepared to submit changes to proposal prior to introduction; MRA meeting with citizen advocates in mid-November for next round of talks*

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*Rick Thompson, Michigan NORML/Cannabis Caucus*

groups of stakeholders are weighing in on a proposal to merge Michigan's medical and recreational cannabis business programs into a single regulatory framework. The proposal, which was released to select individuals and groups by the Marijuana Regulatory Agency, is convoluted and full of new changes to the cannabis program, according to attorneys and citizen advocates.

Concerns about the proposed changes include discarding language from voter directed initiatives in favor of pre-existing language from the Public Health Code; requiring municipalities to accept adult-use businesses if they have

previously allowed only medical marijuana businesses, except retail; incorporation of regulatory authority over Native American groups; and many other issues. Previous versions of this proposal raised the state excise tax and gave the additional revenue to police agencies, a huge sign of concern for cannabis consumers.

Marijuana Regulatory Agency Director Andrew Brisbo recently met with citizen advocates via Zoom to explain the reasoning behind the proposed changes to law and the method by which the two business programs would be integrated. One of the industry leaders present, Jamie Lowell, an author of the MRTMA language and a long-standing cannabis industry figure, says it was agreed the industry leaders will submit a list of their proposed changes in mid-November, before introduction of the bill in the Michigan legislature. The Director agreed to meet with the advocacy group at that time.

Since then the Marijuana Law Section of the State Bar Association has received and evaluated the language. Member attorneys have compiled a second list of issues to be resolved prior to the

proposal's introduction as a bill. The Michigan Cannabis Industry Association has their own list of grievances with the proposal, according to MiCIA principal Robin Schneider. Their involvement in the drafting process predates the MRA's conversation with cannabis advocate leaders.

"There exists right now three lists of contentious issues surrounding the proposal," said Rick Thompson.

"Fortunately there is no need to rush the negotiation process and do it poorly. We've done this many times before. You bring everyone together, have a few months of dialog, and the result is a bill which is supported by the regulators, the regulated and the business interests as well."

Thompson is in leadership positions with the Michigan chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws as well as the Cannabis Caucus of the Michigan Democratic Party, and was the organizer of the advocacy group's conference call with Director Brisbo.

Other members of the advocacy group negotiating with the MRA included Lowell; Redemption cannabis' Ryan Basore; and attorneys Matthew Abel, Thomas Lavigne and Daniel Grow.

"Once the existence of this proposal went public, other advocacy groups have expressed interest in joining the conversation," Thompson said. "We are concerned because a small group of lobbyists are currently shopping this proposal around as-is to legislators in hopes of dropping a bill this year, after the general election. There's no way this proposal can be fully vetted and adjusted in that time frame. Adding to the excise tax? Taking away municipal control? Paying police agencies from cannabis dollars? That's not what the people voted for, not in 2018 nor in 2008. We are confident the Director will not release this proposal as a bill before the people are given their opportunity to speak on the sweeping and permanent changes it would bring to the state's fastest-growing industry."

Media groups interested in viewing the proposal must seek that document from the MRA, Thompson said, noting that Drafts 4 and 5 were made available to advocacy representatives and should be requested. "It's interesting to see how the bill progressed, to see what the MRA originally wanted to make into law."

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