

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members of the New Jersey Senate and General Assembly
FROM: Jennifer Thompson, National Association of Social Workers – NJ Chapter
DATE: March 25, 2019
RE: **A4497/S2703:** "New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory and Expungement Aid Modernization Act"; legalizes personal use cannabis for adults; creates Cannabis Regulatory Commission to regulate personal use and medical cannabis; provides expungement relief for certain past marijuana offenses.

As Executive Director of the National Association of Social Work – NJ Chapter (NASW-NJ), and on behalf of the nearly 7,000 social workers we represent and the clients they serve, we respectfully request your **support of A4497/S2703** which is scheduled for a vote today at both the New Jersey Senate and General Assembly voting sessions.

As a profession that includes many practitioners who specialize in the treatment of addictions, we have carefully considered the potential impact of legalization of recreational adult use cannabis. It is clear to us that the current criminalization approach to regulating cannabis has not significantly curbed abuse of the drug, while at the same time differential application of criminal laws related to cannabis has caused great harm to people of low income and communities of color. Moreover, in states where decriminalization of cannabis has been attempted without concurrent legalization, the policies have not been wholly successful in addressing the social justice and equity issues around cannabis, nor do they address issues related to the inability of a state to regulate and enforce controls on the non-legal cannabis market.

Following lengthy review and discussion, NASW-NJ has concluded that taking a public health approach to the use of legalized cannabis is more consistent with social work's values and professional mandate than the current criminal justice approach. We also recognize that while many adults will use cannabis without problem, as with alcohol, addiction and abuse will continue to be a problem for some individuals. As such, we urge you to consider a floor amendment that would create a designated funding stream for the expansion of mental health and addiction treatment services from revenues generated from the sale of legal cannabis.

It is evident that leadership has done a great deal of work on this issue and has considered multiple factors which create the strongest, most effective legalization bill. However, we believe there are ways in which we can further strengthen this legislation and address the pressing concerns of our community of expert practitioners across the state. The National Association of Social Workers-NJ Chapter opposes the legislation in its current form, however looks forward to working with the Senate leadership on addressing our concerns so that we can fully offer our support of this important piece of legislation. We thank you for your consideration and urge you to vote YES on this import piece of legislation.