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**\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\***

***Statement in Response to Reports of a Likely Deal Between Albany Lawmakers  
on Marijuana Legalization in New York State***

(NEW YORK, NY) – The Legal Aid Society issued the following statement in response to [reporting](#) that Albany lawmakers will likely reach a deal this week on marijuana legalization in New York State:

“Marijuana legalization is a matter of racial justice, and any final legislative language must include the proposals demanded by those New Yorkers who have shouldered the brunt of prohibition and racist enforcement for decades.

Any final deal must:

- contain automatic expungement for past marijuana convictions, necessary to restore communities devastated by the racist and unjust War on Drugs;
- eliminate police’s ability to cite marijuana odor as justification for a stop - other than a stop based on reasonable suspicion for driving under the influence - without which the NYPD will continue to use drug laws to target and harass Black and Latinx New Yorkers;
- increase the legal limit possession thresholds, at least matching the approach of our neighbors in New Jersey by legalizing six ounces;
- treat public consumption of marijuana as a civil infraction under the public health law, not a violation under the penal law which will inevitably lead to New Yorkers’ needless contact with our criminal legal system;
- guarantee an equitable and diverse marijuana industry, including a social equity licensing program on day one, and support for farmers and small businesses over large corporations.

The best interests of Black and Latinx communities must be at the heart of legalization, and tax revenues need to go back to those communities. These demands will help heal the past harms of prohibition while ensuring a more just and fair future.”

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*The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For 145 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. [www.legalaidnyc.org](http://www.legalaidnyc.org)*