

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION

----- X

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

Start: 11:12 A.M.

Recess: 12:30 P.M.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Marjorie Velázquez, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu
Erik D. Bottcher
Gale A. Brewer
Amanda Farias
Shekar Krishnan
Julie Menin
Chi A. Ossé
Julie Won

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Keith Powers and Public Advocate Williams

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION

A P P E A R A N C E S

Ricky Wong,
Assistant Commissioner of Government Affairs at
The Department of Health

Joe Morrisroe,
Deputy Commissioner and Executive Director of NYC
311

Tom Harris,
President of Times Square Alliance

Meredith Berkman,
Co-founder, Parents Against Vaping E-cigarettes

Floyd Jarvis,
Founder of Ganja War Veterans for Equity;
Director of the Borough of Manhattan Community
College Cannabis Workforce and Business
Development Training Program

Christopher Leon Johnson,
Representing himself

Esther Lelievre,
Founder, The Lelievre Foundation

Raul Rivera,
Representing himself

Kabir Gill,
Senior at the Bronx High School of Science
Representing himself

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION

(BLANK)

2 SERGEANT SADOWSKY: Good morning, this is a
3 microphone check for the Committee on Consumer and
4 Worker Protection. Today's date is September 6,
5 2023; located in Council Chambers; recorded by Steve
6 Sadowsky.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to
8 today's New York City Council Hearing of the
9 Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection.

10 At this time, please place all electronic devices
11 to vibrate or silent mode.

12 If you wish to testify, please go up to the
13 sergeants desk to fill out a testimony slip. Written
14 testimony can be emailed to testimony@council.nyc.gov
15 ,again that is testimony@council.nyc.gov.

16 At this time, and going forward, nobody is to
17 approach is to approach the dais. I repeat, nobody
18 is to approach the dais. Thank you for your
19 cooperation.

20 Chair we are ready to begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ:

22 [GAVEL SOUND] [GAVELING IN]

23 Good morning, my name is Marjorie Velázquez, and
24 I am the Chair of the Committee on Consumer Worker

2 Protection. I would like to welcome you to our
3 hearing on Introductions 995 and 1010.

4 I would also like to recognize my fellow council
5 members. Starting from below, we have Council Member
6 Abreu, Council Member Krishnan, we have Council
7 Member Menin, we have Council Member Ossé, we have
8 Council Member Fariás, we have Council Member Won,
9 and we have Council Member Brewer. We are also
10 welcomed by Public Advocate Williams.

11 Eight months after the first conditional adult-
12 use retail dispensaries opened in Manhattan, the
13 illegal cannabis market continues to proliferate.
14 Today we are hearing two bills that will address the
15 harms of unlicensed cannabis retail.

16 Introduction 995, sponsored by Council Member
17 Menin, would create a public awareness campaign on
18 the dangers of purchasing cannabis from an unlicensed
19 retailer. This campaign would spread vital public
20 health and safety information to those vulnerable to
21 consuming potentially dangerous products.

22 Introduction 1010 would establish a 311 complaint
23 category for unlicensed cannabis retailers in the
24 City. This would allow city agencies to track and
25

2 respond to unlicensed retail complaints, and it would
3 inform decisions related to enforcement.

4 I look forward to hearing from the administration
5 and a range of witnesses on this topic.

6 I will now turn it over to Council Member Menin,
7 followed by Council Member Brewer, and then Public
8 Advocate Williams.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Thank you, Chair.

10 We all know that in New York City thousands of
11 smoke shops are illegally selling cannabis and
12 cannabis products. These products have been targeted
13 to our youth and a report issued last November found
14 that many of these products contain lead, Salmonella,
15 E. coli, pesticides, and other hazards that were sold
16 in unlicensed stores. That is why I have introduced
17 Introduction 995 to inform and protect New Yorkers by
18 requiring the City to create a public awareness
19 campaign on the dangers of purchasing cannabis
20 products from unlicensed cannabis retailers. This
21 campaign would include traditional and virtual
22 advertisements and be available in multiple
23 languages.

24 The City already has a playbook of how to
25 confront the issue of unlicensed smoke shops. When I

2 served as Commissioner of DCWP, the City created a
3 successful campaign that warned the public about the
4 dangers of synthetic marijuana also known as K2. The
5 campaign that we launched at that time included
6 outdoor advertising which informed the public that
7 K2 is not marijuana. We had subway advertising, we
8 had bus advertising, and we blanketed the City with
9 this public awareness campaign. We mailed more than
10 9,000 postcards to cigarette retail dealer
11 licensees to inform them that no matter what you call
12 it, K2 is unsafe and illegal. And the postcard also
13 warned of the consequences of selling K2, which
14 included up to a year in prison, fines of more than
15 \$100,000, and suspension, a revocation of their DCWP
16 license. And I just want to say that this campaign
17 really worked in terms of our battle years ago
18 against K2.

19 In February of this year, the Deputy Speaker and
20 I wrote to the Administration asking for a campaign
21 to warn the public about these dangers. Now is the
22 time for a similar public awareness campaign, as the
23 illegal sales of cannabis, coupled with packages
24 featuring colorful cartoon characters, misleadingly
25 portrays these products as safe and legal for our

2 children, and these products clearly violate the
3 City's Consumer Protection Law.

4 To protect our youth and to stop the
5 proliferation of unlicensed cannabis retailers, the
6 City must commit to a robust marketing campaign
7 educating the public about the health risks of
8 purchasing cannabis products from unlicensed
9 retailers.

10 I want to thank the super majority of my
11 colleagues who have a co-sponsor of this legislation,
12 along with the bill drafters, Stephanie Ali
13 (phonetic), and from my team, I want to thank my
14 Chief of Staff, Jonathan Szott; my Legislative and
15 Budget Director, Brandon Jordan; and Legislative
16 Aide, Jan Mendez.

17 Thank you so much, and I look forward to today's
18 hearing.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, Madam
20 Chair. And I am supportive of Intro 1010, and let me
21 tell you why:

22 I read the excellent testimony from Office of
23 Technology and Innovation, thank you Joe Morris Rowe
24 (phonetic).

2 Let me tell you why I disagree. This morning, I
3 called 3-1-1, and I know... Happen to have been
4 there when 311 started, so there are CUNY students,
5 city employees, and King Management staffing 311.
6 And I am sure I got a nice woman, with a really heavy
7 Texas accent, who answered the call. And what she
8 said was basically ,you know, if I am complaining
9 about an illegal -- they are illegal -- cannabis
10 shop, I can go to the website of 311, find a
11 particular location on that website, and then
12 complain to the State Cannabis Office.

13 That all sounds fine, except, as you may know, if
14 you are in the moment and you want to complain,
15 you're not going to do that. So, the City doesn't
16 get the data. The State gets all of the data.

17 So, I am somebody... October... even before
18 that, I did a survey of the Upper West Side, cannabis
19 shops: 63, and now we have 65, between 54th and 108th
20 Streets. Just yesterday, school is beginning, and
21 there's a new one right near a school. I don't
22 understand how in the world they ended up within 500
23 feet of a school. It is illegal for liquor, how in
24 the world they end up near schools, and some of them
25 open at 7:00 a.m. What store opens at 7:00 a.m.

2 unless you want to hook in high school students? I
3 happen to have many, many high schools in my
4 district. I am beyond outraged by them.

5 So, now, if I get such a call, guess what I have
6 to do? I have to call -- first, I am a letter
7 writer, so I call and write the district attorney,
8 the sheriff, and I have been out many times on rage
9 with the sheriff. I swear to God, two days later,
10 they're all open. I have seen them, I have been
11 there, and I watched it. Corporation Council,
12 working on some of the nuisance that they might be
13 able to do, the State Cannabis Office, and then I let
14 all the high schools know, because I am afraid that
15 they don't realize that their kids, particularly now
16 in September, could be... Big sign says, "Under 21".
17 Hell no. They're letting people in these illegal
18 shops. I see them myself.

19 So, it seems to me that the City might want this
20 data. When it goes to the State, it doesn't come
21 back to the City, it stays with the State. And I
22 have great respect for the State Cannabis Office, I
23 know what pressure they are under, lawsuits, et
24 cetera, et cetera. But, 311 is our data. I am an
25 author of the Open Data Bill. I feel very strongly

2 about data. So, it seems to me that that's what we
3 would want in order to be able to counter. So far,
4 very few have closed. And I think, uhm, even NYPD,
5 which is not supposed to be as involved as one
6 might think, would like this data. And I am sure, in
7 Manhattan, the district attorney would like this
8 data. He has been terrific going after the banks,
9 hopefully going after the owners, trying everything,
10 and, yet, they are not shutting down. So, I am a big
11 believer of 311. I am a big believer in the data,
12 but if you shuttle the data to another office, you're
13 not going to have it. So, that is why I am
14 supportive -- two reasons: One, making it easier for
15 the constituents, particularly parents who are
16 really, really concerned, to be able to acknowledge
17 and to have the City acknowledge that we have a
18 problem with an illegal shop, and secondly, for the
19 City to have the data.

20 So, with all due respect to this testimony, I
21 strongly disagree, and I think that the City should
22 have its own data. And we do that by having a
23 toggle, so to speak, on the computer, at 311, for
24 illegal cannabis shops. Thank you very much, Madam
25 Chair.

2 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Good morning, my name
3 is Jumaane Williams, I am the Public Advocate for the
4 City of New York. I would like to thank Chair
5 Velázquez and members of the Committee on Consumer
6 and Worker Protection for holding this hearing.

7 In 2021, New York State legalized adult-use
8 Cannabis or recreational marijuana through the
9 Marijuana Regulation Taxation Act or MRTA. That act
10 created the Office of Cannabis Management governed by
11 a cannabis control board, which issues licenses for
12 cannabis retail dispensaries and develops regulation
13 on such businesses. This legislation was monumental
14 in that it gave priority to justice involved
15 individuals affected by decades of over policing and
16 unjust and unfair drug laws and sentences and offered
17 them an opportunity to become licensed retailers.

18 In December of 2022, a licensed dispensary
19 operated by the nonprofit housing works became the
20 first in New York City to open for business. Nine
21 months later, the role of dispensaries across the
22 state has lagged and is currently stalled. As of
23 July 2023, the Cannabis Control Board issued over 450
24 conditional adult-use licenses, yet less than 25
25 business are currently operating. New York City has

1 significant share of that portion with non-licensed
2 dispensaries throughout the City, mostly centered in
3 Manhattan. Further delays have afflicted existing
4 license holders, due to an injunction blocking new
5 dispensaries from opening, and the State from further
6 expanding the retail cannabis market under current
7 licensing rules. Hundreds of licensees are in limbo,
8 many of whom have invested ample time and money into
9 legitimatizing their businesses, after they
10 experienced the negative impacts of harsh cannabis
11 laws.
12

13 In the wake of this lag of licensed dispensaries,
14 numerous unlicensed cannabis retailers have
15 proliferated. These retailers have existed long
16 before the legalization of retail marijuana and have
17 been increasing, especially with the slow legal
18 market that cannot meet the demand throughout the
19 City.

20 My greatest concern with these unlicensed
21 retailers is that along with being unlicensed, what
22 is being sold is also unregulated. There is no
23 uniform way to know what an individual is purchasing.
24 Products sold in unlicensed shops often subvert state
25

2 packaging laws that require clear testing
3 information.

4 Further, an issue that is of increasing concern
5 is the potential sale of these products to our young
6 people. While it is my firm belief that
7 incarceration is not the answer, we cannot repeat the
8 wrongs we are seeking to address. Enforcement is
9 still needed for these unlicensed retailers. I have
10 recommended fines; I have recommended revocation of
11 product and closure of stores. And I have to tell
12 you, this is one of the few times that all spectrums
13 of politics are asking for some kind of enforcement
14 for these illegal dispensaries.

15 One of the considerations addressing the growing
16 issue could be the legitimization of certain
17 unlicensed retailers via transitional licenses, which
18 would ultimately place them under state regulations
19 and ensure health and safety guidelines are followed,
20 and, of course, that there are no sales to underage
21 individuals. The expansion could be in collaboration
22 with those who have been part of legacy cannabis with
23 a goal of directing profit and funds back into the
24 hands of individuals and communities harmed by the
25 so-called "war on drugs".

2 New Yorkers, especially, those who are justice
3 involved due to the possession of the sale of
4 marijuana, deserve an opportunity to legitimize their
5 business and engage in a just economy for legal
6 marijuana sales in New York.

7 The City and the State should provide these
8 opportunities to rectify decades of over policing and
9 mass incarceration. The State has to reconcile with
10 the ongoing issues that led to the current injunction
11 and meet the equity requirements outlined in by the
12 MRTA.

13 At the end of the day, there are nearly 500
14 licenses, and most of them are waiting for a chance
15 to contribute to the economy, provide dignified jobs
16 and career paths, and keep New Yorkers on track to
17 support themselves, their families, and their
18 communities. We must keep the licensing process
19 flowing, identifying a system that works, and seek
20 out justice and equity. I know the City is limited
21 in what they can do, so I am thankful that they are
22 having this hearing -- thank you -- and hearing these
23 pieces of legislation.

24 I do want to actually just give a hat tip to The
25 Sheriff's Department for how they have been executing

2 these -- even from the pandemic -- closing down
3 illegal spaces -- even by taking away, uh, back then,
4 weapons. And I have not heard an incident being
5 reported about how they are doing it. So, I just
6 wanted to name that. Thank you so much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, good morning, and
8 welcome. My name is Sarah Swaine, counsel to the
9 Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection, and I
10 will be moderating this hearing.

11 Before we begin, I would like to remind everyone
12 who is joining us via Zoom that you will be on mute
13 until you are called on to testify, at which point
14 you will be asked to accept to be unmuted by the
15 host.

16 I will be calling on public witnesses to testify
17 after the conclusion of the Administrations'
18 testimony and council member questions, so please
19 listen carefully for your name to be called.

20 Please note that council members will have two
21 minutes for questions, and we will be allowing a
22 second round for questioning if needed.

23 We will now call on representatives from the
24 Administration to testify. We will be hearing
25 testimony from Ricky Wong, Assistant Commissioner of

2 Government Affairs at the Department of Health and
3 Mental Hygiene and Joe Morrisroe, Deputy Commissioner
4 and Executive Director of NYC 311.

5 At this time, I will administer the affirmation.
6 Administration panelists, please raise your right
7 hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole
8 truth, and nothing but the truth, before this
9 committee, and to respond honestly to council member
10 questions?

11 [ADMINISTRATION AFFIRMS]

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. At this time, I
13 would like to invite you to present your testimony.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Thank you.

15 Good morning, Chair Velázquez and members of the
16 committee. I am Ricky Wong, Assistant for the Bureau
17 of Government Affairs at the New York City Department
18 of Health And Mental Hygiene. On behalf of
19 Commissioner Vasan, thank you for the opportunity to
20 testify today on Introduction 995, which would
21 require The Health Department to create a public
22 awareness campaign on the dangers of purchasing
23 cannabis or cannabis products from unlicensed
24 cannabis retailers.

2 I'm grateful for the opportunity to speak about
3 this legislation. First, I wanted to provide some
4 background on how the agency is thinking about this
5 issue since New York State legalized consumption and
6 possession of up to three ounces of cannabis for
7 adult age is 21 and over in 2021.

8 The Health Department is tasked with protecting
9 the health and safety of all New Yorkers, which
10 includes the provision of evidence-based information
11 and resources regarding recreational drug use. The
12 Health Department implemented a multi-pronged
13 strategy to educate providers and the public -
14 including minors and young adults - on the health
15 considerations of cannabis use and legalization.

16 We established an agency work group in order to
17 organize cannabis work and published four public
18 education fact sheets and a general information
19 postcard covering the following topics: Safer Use,
20 Health Effects, Legal Use, and Know Your Rights.

21 These materials are available online and in print
22 in multiple languages and have been distributed to
23 community organizations at community events. We are
24 currently in the early stages of developing a public
25

2 education pamphlet specifically targeted towards
3 youth.

4 Communicating potential health impacts of
5 substance use is an important part of our mission.
6 Like any substance, cannabis can have associated
7 health risks and benefits. Health risks linked to
8 cannabis include higher risk of motor vehicle
9 crashes; early onset of psychotic disorders for those
10 already at risk; more frequent breathing and coughing
11 symptoms, especially when smoking or vaping cannabis;
12 vaping related lung injuries; and cannabis use during
13 pregnancy that can have harmful effects on a baby's
14 development.

15 Restrictive drug policies have limited research
16 on how cannabis affects health, but existing research
17 shows that cannabis can be helpful for some
18 conditions including chronic pain in adults,
19 chemotherapy induced nausea, and specific multiple
20 sclerosis symptoms. The Health Department is still
21 learning more about the long-term effects of
22 cannabis, and we will continue to educate the public
23 as we learn.

24 Now I want to speak about unlicensed, cannabis,
25 retailers, and synthetic cannabinoids:

2 Sale of adult recreational cannabis is currently
3 legal only through the New York State Office of
4 Cannabis Management License Conditional Adult Use
5 Retail Dispensaries.

6 The Health Department is aware of the increasing
7 presence of unlicensed cannabis retailers as the
8 state continues to implement retailing licensing.
9 Products sold in retailers without state licenses
10 have not undergone state regulated quality and safety
11 controls.

12 The Health Department is aware of the risks of
13 using unregulated products, and we agree with the
14 Council that more education is needed.

15 The Health Department uses population level data
16 and surveys to identify health trends across the
17 City. To date, we have not seen an increase in
18 adverse health outcomes associated with using
19 products purchased at unlicensed cannabis retailers,
20 nor an increase in emergency department visits
21 associated with cannabis use.

22 Even though we are not seeing negative effects in
23 our data, we still want New Yorkers to be sure that
24 if they choose to consume cannabis, that it is safe
25 for use and not a synthetic cannabinoid product.

2 I want to take some time to explain what a
3 synthetic cannabinoids product is:

4 Synthetic cannabinoids are not cannabis and have
5 different use patterns and health effects than
6 cannabis. They consist of leaves sprayed with
7 chemicals that are either smoked or ingested.

8 Synthetic cannabinoids contain a dangerous mix of
9 chemicals sprayed onto plant material making its
10 effects unpredictable. Health effects can include
11 erratic behavior, severe, anxiety, paranoia,
12 confusion, hallucinations, nausea, vomiting, rapid,
13 heart, rate, and seizures. In New York State, it is
14 illegal to possess, sell, offer to sell, or
15 manufacture synthetic cannabinoids, and we discourage
16 individuals from using them.

17 Currently, our data shows that emergency
18 department related visits involving synthetic
19 cannabinoids make up a very small portion of drug
20 related emergency department visits overall and we
21 actually have seen decreases slightly between 2021
22 and 2022.

23 We encourage members of the public who wish to
24 legally purchase cannabis to purchase it from OCM
25 licensed facilities to ensure that they know that is

2 has it has gone through the proper regulatory process
3 and is deemed safe for use.

4 I will now turn to the proposed Introduction 995:
5 The Health Department supports the intent of this
6 legislation to raise awareness, particularly among
7 youth, of the health risks associated with cannabis,
8 including the use of cannabis purchased products at
9 unlicensed retailers and synthetic cannabinoids.

10 We look forward to working with Council to meet
11 the need for youth-focused communications about
12 cannabis related health risks while ensuring that
13 these efforts complement existing education efforts
14 already being taken by The Health Department and OCM.

15 The Health Department remains committed to
16 providing evidence-based accessible information
17 regarding cannabis and synthetic cannibal use, and we
18 are happy to discuss with the Council how we can best
19 support the intention of this legislation.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to testify here
21 today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Good morning,
23 Chair Velázquez and members of the City Council
24 Committee On Consumer and Worker Protection. My name
25 is Joe Morrisroe, and I am Deputy Commissioner of New

2 York City 311 under the Office of Technology and
3 Innovation (also known as OTI). I am here to discuss
4 Introduction 1010 proposed legislation aimed at
5 creating a 311 service request for unlicensed,
6 cannabis dealers.

7 As you know, 311 delivers fast and easy access to
8 government services and information to all New
9 Yorkers. 311 is available 24 hours a day, seven days
10 a week, 365 days a year through multiple channels
11 including the call center, online portal, text,
12 mobile application, and social media.

13 Originally launched as a call center, New York
14 City 311 has evolved into the most comprehensive
15 municipal government customer service platform in the
16 nation. 311 received 35 million customer contacts in
17 2022, and on an annual basis New York City 311
18 receives more call than all other US city 311 call
19 centers combined.

20 I am also pleased to share with the Council a
21 recent report by an independent third-party on the
22 public's satisfaction with 311. Frontline 311 call
23 center representatives received a customer
24 satisfaction rating of 94, positioning 311 in the top
25 10 percent among private sector companies. The level

2 of public satisfaction with 311 is a testament to the
3 dedication and commitment of the entire 311 team to
4 serve their fellow New Yorkers every day.

5 As 311's deputy commissioner, I oversee all
6 aspects of 311, from the operation of the most
7 familiar component - the call-center - to the
8 creation and implementation of multiple customer-
9 facing channels, performance, results and quality
10 control measures, interaction with city agencies, and
11 data collection. 311 reports directly to OTI, which
12 provides support for the 311 organization, and works
13 collaboratively with 311 on the continual evolution
14 and enhancements to service delivery and customer
15 experience.

16 It is important to note that 311 serves as the
17 *platform* to provide information and services to the
18 public. With few exceptions, public interactions with
19 311 results in one of the following outcomes:

- 20 • An Information Request such as "When is my
21 trash pickup day?"
- 22 • A Referral To an External Entity such as the
23 New York State or the FCC.
- 24 • Service Requests such as submitting a
25 ticket.

2 We rely on our collaborative relationships with
3 each city agency to build out the service request
4 forms and information pages which also known as
5 "knowledge articles", that properly reflect each
6 agency's or office's mission and services.

7 With respect to service requests specifically,
8 311 does not create them in a vacuum - there must be
9 an agency that will except the request, investigate,
10 and if applicable, enforce. When an agency decides
11 that adding a new service request is necessary, they
12 contact 311 and OTI to create, test, and deploy a
13 complaint form.

14 Introduction 1010, sponsored by Council Member
15 Brewer, seeks to create a 311 service request for
16 quote unlicensed cannabis retailers. While we
17 acknowledge and appreciate the Council's efforts to
18 combat the issue of unlicensed cannabis shops that
19 have proliferated across the city -- and we empathize
20 with the concerns that the Council have expressed
21 this morning -- the City does not oversee the
22 licensing of cannabis retailers, the State Office of
23 Cannabis Management, OCAM, overseas such licenses.

24 311 does provide information on how to submit a
25 complaint to the OCM Enforcement Unit about cannabis

2 sales and products in a knowledge article on the 311
3 website. And if someone called 311 to report an
4 issue, the customer is referred to the OCM
5 enforcement unit.

6 As noted, it is an agency that comes to 311 to
7 create a new service request not the converse. Absent
8 a designated city agency to respond and resolve a
9 service request, it is not best practice to create
10 tickets for issues that are beyond the purview of the
11 City.

12 I thank you for this opportunity, and I welcome
13 council member questions.

14 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Introduction 995 requires
15 a collaboration between DCWP and DOHMH to create a
16 public awareness campaign on the dangers of
17 purchasing unlicensed cannabis.

18 What are some of those dangers?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Thank you for the
20 question, Chair.

21 As mentioned in my testimony, unlicensed
22 retailer... Cannabis retailers, their products are
23 generally not ,you know, have not gone through a
24 vetting process by the state. So, we would want to
25 echo those ,you know, sentiments in any kind of

2 public education format. Also ,you know, because we,
3 uh, the legislation calls for targeting the education
4 campaign towards youth, we want to remind youth that
5 ,you know, generally legal cannabis can only be
6 purchased by adults over the age of 21. And there
7 are adverse health effects for all ages regarding the
8 use of cannabis.

9 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Could you explain some of
10 those dangers, then, and those health effects?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Sure, uh, as
12 mentioned in my testimony, there are... We have a
13 flyer that is available, and some of those health
14 risks, again, including ,you know, include impaired
15 use of motor vehicles, which leads to crashes; early
16 onset of psychotic disorder for those already at
17 risk. And people who start using cannabis at a
18 younger age, again, increases the frequency, uh,
19 again, also frequent breathing and coughing symptoms,
20 which, uh, are especially exacerbated when smoking or
21 vaping cannabis products, uh, as well too as vaping
22 related lung injuries.

23 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: So, you just mentioned the
24 youth. Uhm, New York City school staffers are
25 reporting an uptick in cannabis use among students

2 and how many unlicensed smoke shops are using
3 marketing tactics to appeal to the young people.

4 How will your campaign engage, uh, young school-
5 aged children?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: So, school health
7 actually partially resides at The Health Department.
8 And along with DOE, we work with our DOE partners to
9 ,you know, craft messaging targeted to students.

10 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: And what does that look
11 like?

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: We will be happy to
13 discuss that ,you know, more, but it is similar
14 information that I just previously mentioned.

15 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Okay.

16 And how can we use this campaign to help
17 consumers distinguish between licensed and unlicensed
18 cannabis retailers?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: We would echo what
20 was mentioned in the testimony that ,you know, uh,
21 folks pay... who choose to use, uh, cannabis that
22 they patronize these retailers, that they ,you know,
23 check to make sure that these retailers are licensed,
24 and if they're not, they should avoid utilizing or
25 patronizing these unlicensed retailers.

2 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: So, the Sheriff's Office,
3 uh, Joint Compliance Task Force receives daily
4 information related to the proliferation of
5 unlicensed smoke shops. Are there any updates that
6 the Administration can share about the status the
7 task force and its enforcement strategy?

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: I would have to
9 defer to our colleagues at the Sheriff's Office on
10 that.

11 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Okay.

12 To what extent is OCM sharing information with
13 task force agencies about incident reports they have
14 received related to unlicensed cannabis retailers in
15 the City?

16 ADMINISTRATION: (NO RESPONSE)

17 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Any of you? Going once,
18 going twice?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Thank you for the
20 question. Uh, 311 is a member of the task force,
21 along with a number of other city agencies. I am not
22 directly sure of what information has been received
23 at this point.

24 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Okay.

2 Are you aware of any incident reports, uh,
3 related to the sale of synthetic cannabinoids in the
4 unlicensed retail shops?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: That we are not
6 aware of. Again, as ,you know, Council Member Menin
7 had also mentioned as well, too, it is illegal to
8 process, manufacture, or sell synthetic cannabinoids
9 specifically, as mentioned, K2. Uh, generally if
10 that is found there would be additional penalties
11 regarding that and seizures as well, too. But, we
12 are not ,you know, hearing any of that ,you know,
13 being sold at unlicensed cannabis retailers.

14 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: So, you're saying
15 penalties and seizures? When does it close down?
16 When can we shut them down especially when it is
17 synthetic?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: I defer to our
19 colleagues at the Sheriff's Department for that. We
20 are not the enforcement agency regarding the seizures
21 and closures, et cetera.

22 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: We have been joined by
23 Council Member Bottcher.

24

25

2 Currently, what happens when an individual calls
3 3-1-1 to file a complaint related to an unlicensed
4 cannabis retail operation?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: I can take that
6 one.

7 A customer contacts 311, if they called a 311
8 call center, we have a knowledge article that
9 provides the information. And if they want to make a
10 complaint, the customer is referred to the New York
11 State Office of Cannabis Management -- specifically
12 the enforcement unit. If a customer goes and wants
13 to sell serve and goes online, that same information
14 is available on the website.

15 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Are there any
16 circumstances where the complaint would not be
17 referred to OCM?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: I am not aware of
19 any circumstances where they would not be.

20 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Does OCM share any
21 incident reports with other city agencies?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: I cannot speak for
23 other city agencies, but 311 does not receive
24 information from OCM.

2 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: And do you believe that
3 OCM is best equipped to handle these complaints?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Thank you for the
5 question. My understanding is that OCM is the
6 responsible entity for handling enforcement, and;
7 therefore, I believe they are the correct agency.

8 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Whether they are correct,
9 uh, my question was are they best equipped?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: In terms of what
11 they do and what their scope, I am not able to be
12 able to judge whether they are best equipped.

13 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Okay, thank you for that.

14 And, then, in the past year, how many 3-1-1
15 complaints have come in relating to unlicensed
16 cannabis retailers?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: In the past year,
18 actually going back to November when this particular
19 item became available, calls to 311 on the topic, uh,
20 just over 600 -- 680, I believe.

21 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Have you observed any
22 trends in these complaints?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: No we have not.
24 We do call listening and evaluate calls. Customers
25 call and if they want to make the complaint, they are

2 referred and they follow the referral to file a
3 complaint with the OCM.

4 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Have you mapped out the
5 locations of these complaints?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: The calls that we
7 receive and referred, uh, there is no collection of
8 location. The information is to get the customer
9 connected to the entity that is responsible for
10 handling the complaint. So no information is
11 collected along the way.

12 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Do you have data on the
13 other cannabis related complaints?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Sorry? Other
15 cannabis related complaints?

16 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Mm-hmm.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: I am not sure if I
18 follow with that?

19 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Maybe not related to
20 unlicensed operations, but just any?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Oh, uh, so, thank
22 you for the clarification. We do have the ability to
23 track how many customers ask different questions or
24 access 3-1-1 to receive or get information on
25 different questions. So, there are a couple of other

2 knowledge articles associated with cannabis -- about
3 legalization, about licensing. And we can be a...
4 we can track the number of inquiries for those
5 particular topics. I don't have the information
6 readily available, though.

7 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Can you get it to us?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Absolutely.

9 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Awesome, thank you.

10 And, then, lastly, are there any instances where
11 311 has a complaint category and the City does not
12 oversee the licensing?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Thank you for
14 that question, Chair.

15 There is... All 311 complaint categories are
16 served by New York City agencies or a New York City
17 office.

18 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Okay, thank you for that.

19 Now I am going to call on Council Member Ossé.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you.

21 The first question that I wanted to ask is ,you
22 know, the bill, Introduction 1010, says that
23 complaints will be sent to the appropriate agency for
24 resolution.

1 COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION 35

2 I want to ask either of you, will DCWP, uhm, and
3 what enforcement steps will be taken after that
4 resolution is sent to your agency or the appropriate
5 agency?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Thank you for the
7 question.

8 I will ask for clarification. You're asking what
9 resolution steps an agency will take?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Yes.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Okay. I know from
12 the... I can speak to the 311 side where we would
13 handle the intake and referral, as we do today, and
14 facilitate that customer connecting with the entity
15 that is responsible for enforcement.

16 I am not familiar with what steps are taken by
17 that agency today.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: I would not be able
19 to speak for our colleagues at DCWP. But, The Health
20 Department, uh, if there is a complaint about
21 adulterated food products or unlicensed food
22 service... So, in essence, an unlicensed restaurant
23 or an actual licensed restaurant serving food
24 products that is adulterated with cannabis or
25 cannabis products -- THC or CBD -- then, generally,

2 our inspectors would go along with the Sheriff's
3 Department and/or OCM to conduct enforcement. And we
4 are looking for unlicensed food service. That's the
5 first thing. But, if there is a licensed restaurant
6 there, if they are adulterating food products, which
7 is not allowed, we would issue violations
8 accordingly, uh, according to the health code.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Council Member Brewer?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.

12 So, I want to just reiterate what I said, which
13 is that data is important. The Mayor says that. I
14 say that. You say that. If you don't have it, you
15 cannot act. I don't know, we have 1,400 - 1,500
16 illegal shops at the moment. We do have a sheriff who
17 is doing a great job and city agencies could go to
18 him.

19 We have active district attorneys, I know they
20 are State, but they... Uh, information could be
21 shared. Guess what? As recent as this morning, as
22 recently as this morning, I was talking to the DA,
23 and he is trying to get data from the City. That's
24 what he said. We need to have this data.

2 Now, when it goes to the State, that's very nice.
3 I know they don't share it. I don't even know if
4 they respond. People who have made this somewhat
5 arduous web based complaint, do not hear for days and
6 days and days.

7 You also have an SBS cannabis person, and I think
8 some council members have suggested some kind of
9 cannabis office. I am against more offices, because
10 I think we need to do more with what we have. But,
11 you do have somebody in the SBS who is an expert at
12 this topic. So, it is, with all due respect, not
13 correct to say we don't have folks working on this
14 issue.

15 Very specifically, the Corporation Counsel is
16 working on this issue. We can send complaints there,
17 because that is a city agency, and they are trying to
18 deal with nuisance.

19 So, I would suggest that between SBS, Corporation
20 Counsel, Sheriff -- three legitimate city agencies --
21 that we would want this data. In fact, I would even
22 suggest that we would immediately be constantly
23 talking to the State Cannabis Office to figure out
24 where this information lies and what they are doing
25 with it.

2 Let me be specific. I am panicked, literally,
3 about the fact that these illegal shops operate near
4 schools. The new one that just opened in my district
5 is right near six high schools. For the reasons that
6 we know [TIMER CHIMES] that young people are going to
7 take advantage. So, that one should be closed.
8 Again, I am going to have to work with all these four
9 agencies, no data. So, I really feel very strongly
10 that this would be an example where local agencies,
11 city agencies are working on this issue, could take
12 the data and 311 should be the recipient. Thank you
13 very much. I don't know if you want to respond?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: Thank you, Council
15 Member Brewer, I will respond to say that we share
16 the spirit, the intent of the legislation. And I do
17 share the concern that you is raised by you and by
18 other council members with respect to the impact of
19 these. The other information, I am happy to take
20 that back and share with the broader task force. As
21 I mentioned earlier, 311 is one of several agencies a
22 part of the task force, and I would be happy to
23 convey that information back.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Does that task force meet?
25 Has it ever met -- that taskforce -- recently?

1 COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION 39

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: I cannot speak to
3 how recent, but it has met, yes.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: A big couple years ago?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MORRISROE: I'm familiar with
6 the one more recently within the last... within this
7 calendar year.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Council Member Menin?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Great, thank you. A couple
11 of questions. In January this committee held a
12 hearing, and the Administration testified that it was
13 interested in doing more public awareness about the
14 dangers of marketing to youth. You mentioned that
15 you have this working group, is DCWP part of the
16 working group?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: I believe they are,
18 but I can double check.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, I mean, I think it's
20 critically important that DCWP -- it's the agency
21 that's licensing ,you know, is involved in any kind
22 of public awareness. Like, if it is just DOHMH, that
23 is, I think, a real problem. So, if you could please
24 get back to the committee that would be great.

25

2 Secondly, you mentioned in your testimony, I am
3 just going to read this sentence, because it struck
4 me, "... to date, we have not seen an increase in
5 adverse health outcomes associated with using
6 products purchased at unlicensed cannabis retailers,
7 nor an increase in emergency department visits
8 associated with cannabis use." How are you tracking
9 the reporting?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Through syndromic
11 surveillance -- so real time reporting from
12 hospitals. They are required to report issues that
13 kind of come up. And basically we base in model
14 trends and ,you know, try to act on it from a public
15 health perspective. So, to your point, regarding K2
16 pre pandemic, you know, not only was it... is it
17 illegal to processes, sell, or manufacture K2, we
18 were seeing elevated instances of emergency
19 department visits, hospitalizations, and basically
20 hearing reports of people passing out in front of
21 businesses, because they had consumed K2. That
22 prompted us to escalate ,you know, our efforts as far
23 as addressing it from an enforcement part along with
24 other city agencies and also from the public
25 awareness part as well, too. Conversely, we are not

2 seeing that in our syndromic surveillance with ,you
3 know, cannabis purchased from unlicensed retailers or
4 cannabis in general -- any escalations of
5 hospitalizations, any escalations of emergency
6 department visits. [TIMER CHIMES]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Can I just, Chair, ask one
8 question, a followup on that? But, don't you think
9 that is because young people are... do not want to
10 report? I mean, you're asking that a young person
11 who is ingesting this cannabis related product to
12 then either, if they are going to a doctor, they are
13 going to an emergency room, I mean, don't you think
14 that there is a deterrent effect on young people
15 reporting this, and that is perhaps why you are not
16 seeing a spike in the data?

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Thank you for the
18 question, Council Member. I think that is a fair
19 point. However, we do have a poison control center,
20 and ,you know, we are seeing numbers being reported
21 to Poison Control asking for advice ,you know,
22 regarding when a youth or a minor ingests cannabis.
23 Generally, the thinking there is that, because they
24 don't want to get enforcement escalated, they just
25 want treatment for the person who has ingested it,

2 they ask us for guidance whether or not it is ,you
3 know, correct to go to seek help at an emergency
4 department or at a hospital or go to a clinic, or,
5 can we just let this kind of pass from the child, or
6 there any other health concerns that I can get ,you
7 know, from this? And we have seen that, and we
8 collect data from that. But, again, it is a very
9 small, minute, uh, sector of what we are seeing
10 inquires on or surveillance data on as well, too.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MENIN: Okay, thank you.

12 Council Member Bottcher?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Good morning. The Mayor
14 supports the legalization of cannabis for adult use.
15 The City Council, by and large, supports it, everyone
16 up here supports it. But, what we are seeing now
17 with the proliferation of illegal cannabis shops in
18 or particular concern to me and many of my
19 constituents, particularly many of the parents in our
20 district, is use by minors -- how easy it is for
21 minors to access cannabis with these unlicensed
22 shops.

23 Could you, for the public, as The Health
24 Department , highlight for us what the dangers are,
25 in particular for minors, of cannabis use? I think

2 it's important to highlight that. I don't think it
3 gets talked about enough about how harmful it could
4 be to a young person's health to excessively use
5 cannabis.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Thank you for the
7 question, Council Member. Yes, and, so, again, as
8 mentioned in our testimony, we have flyers that speak
9 to the health affects of both adults and also the
10 youth as well, too. As mentioned before, if a youth
11 is able to get access to a cannabis type product, uh,
12 depending on the dosage, uh, every individual can
13 potentially have an adverse health effects depending
14 on how they ,you know, ingest it -- whether it is
15 smoking or vaping. That's already a concern because
16 ,you know, The Health Department has always been
17 concerned about smoking and vaping. So, they can
18 potentially be doing damage to their bodies as far as
19 lung damage is concerned. An overall health... long
20 term health effects are still unknown about consuming
21 cannabis long term. And, so, these are concerns, and
22 ,you know, we empathize with the Council, and that is
23 why we are here today. We do agree that more
24 education, more information is always helpful.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEr: On The Health

3 Department's website, [TIMER CHIMES] I see several
4 pages relating to alcohol use by minors. There are
5 PDFs, there are documents, there are recourse guides,
6 I don't see on The Health Department's website
7 materials tailored to cannabis use by minors. Are
8 you aware of those resources that might be on there
9 that I might not be finding?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Sure, if you go on
11 to The Health Department's website, and if you search
12 cannabis or marijuana, you will see several public-
13 facing documents including a couple of flyers
14 dedicated around safer use and addressing edibles as
15 well, too, as far as youth is concerned. As
16 mentioned in the testimony as well, too, we are
17 actually putting together a more comprehensive
18 pamphlet targeted towards youth, and that will be
19 coming out shortly.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEr: I would ask that, as
21 school is starting, that you expedite those efforts
22 to have more materials directly relating to minors,
23 because I and my colleagues, I know we would like to
24 help disseminate that among the school communities in
25 our districts. There is a rehab center and addiction

2 treatment center in my district in Chelsea. And the
3 head the off Clinical Medicine for that clinic, was
4 describing to me what he is seeing among minors
5 coming in for treatment who are experiencing
6 psychiatric disorder symptoms as a result of just
7 excessive marijuana use, and also just the potency of
8 it now is so different and so much stronger than what
9 they had then when I was in high school, that it, uh,
10 it can be dangerous. And we would like to do more to
11 share that information with parents and students.
12 So, I really appreciate your efforts and look forward
13 to hearing more from The Health Department about
14 that.

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WONG: Thank you for the
16 question, Council Member. Happy to follow up with
17 your office and the Council. I would like to remind
18 the committee here today that school health does
19 reside partially at The Health Department along with
20 DOE. And we work very closely with our DOE partners
21 when we have information to share.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: All right, we have no more
24 questions.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will give the
3 Administration an opportunity to collect their
4 things, and we will turn to public testimony.

5 If you are here in person, please come up and
6 take a seat at the table, and you may begin once the
7 sergeant has notified you that your time has started.
8 You will have two minutes to testify, so please begin
9 once the time starts.

10 Council members who have questions for a
11 particular panelists should let me know, and I will
12 call on you after the panelist has completed their
13 testimony.

14 Our first panel will be an in personal panel: Tom
15 Harris, Meredith Berkman, and Floyd Jarvis.

16 MR. TOM HARRIS: Good morning, Chairperson
17 Velázquez and members of the Committee on Consumer
18 and Worker Protection. My name is Tom Harris, and I
19 am the President of the Times Square Alliance, the
20 business improvement district that exists to make
21 Times Square clean, safe, and desirable for all.

22 Before I begin, I want to state for the record
23 that the Alliance is not opposed to the legalization
24 of cannabis, and we have had conversations both with
25 The State Office of Cannabis Management and with an

2 entrepreneur looking to open legal dispensaries in
3 Times Square. The challenge our city and Times
4 Square and face is not with legal establishments, it
5 is with illegal establishments that market and sell
6 to minors.

7 I want to thank the City Council for advancing
8 this legislation. Anything that will increase
9 awareness and add tracking of unregulated illegal
10 cannabis stores in our city that market and sell to
11 minors is appreciated and supported.

12 The bills that are being introduced today are
13 helpful, and we fully support them -- much more is
14 needed. Introduction 1010 is so important. Data
15 driven decisions and action cannot be underestimated.
16 I am shocked that the City administration does not
17 understand that. Education and tracking complaints
18 alone, absent of effective strategies and strong
19 enforcement measures for illegal operators, sends a
20 mixed message.

21 A bar or liquor store would not be allowed to
22 operate without a license and would be subject to
23 swift enforcement and closure. We feel strongly that
24 a comprehensive approach is needed to achieve the
25 same results for illegal cannabis stores. The City

2 and Council need to adopt an extreme ownership
3 mindset and do all it can.

4 Introduction 1001 holds landlords accountable,
5 995 educates, and 1010 collects data. We need to
6 hold the operators accountable through stronger
7 nuisance abatement laws. We also need to expand
8 enforcement. The Sheriff is doing a good job, but
9 more illegal stores open than close, and the Sheriff
10 lacks the resources for this task. I would also urge
11 the [TIMER CHIMES] the Council to dedicate those
12 recourses. And I would also urge the Council to
13 rally their constituents to demand that Albany
14 provides the same tools for cannabis that allow the
15 SLA to immediately close establishments that sell
16 liquor without a license. The Times Square community
17 had two illegal weed stores in December, ten more
18 opened this year, and only one was closed. Two
19 homicides occurred within a block of one store, a
20 person was shot in front of another, and one was
21 robbed. Additionally, our children are frequent
22 customers and there is no oversight to ensure the
23 products they purchase are safe. To make our city
24 safer, lawmakers and the Administration must make the
25 reforms necessary to deal with this crisis.

2 Thank you for your time.

3 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: Sorry, I am just taking out
4 my props, which are not props, that's the scary part.

5 Thank you so much, Chair Velázquez and
6 distinguished members of this committee. My name is
7 Meredith Berkman, and I am here representing Parents
8 Against Vaping E-cigarettes, a group that I co-
9 founded in 2018 with two other concerned New York
10 moms. And the impetus was our discovery that a JUUL
11 representation had entered our then teenaged sons'
12 school through an outside anti-addiction group, and
13 without the school's knowledge, told an assembly of
14 ninth graders that JUUL was "totally safe". We are
15 the first and only national parent voice fighting
16 youth vaping and tobacco use and the predatory
17 behavior of the vaping and tobacco industries. So,
18 if we are focused on tobacco, and this is a hearing
19 about cannabis, why are we wasting your time and why
20 are we here? Because, as we all know, here in New
21 York City cannabis products and flavored nicotine
22 vapes, which are illegal under New York City law, are
23 inexorably and insidiously linked by bad actor
24 retailers and an abject failure of enforcement around
25 existing regulations meant to keep these harmful

2 substances away from our kids. And has been
3 discussed all morning, these things are readily
4 available to minors on literally every single street
5 corner in unlicensed so called "convenience stores"
6 growing like poisonous weeds across the city --
7 nothing new. We testified about this before some of
8 you months ago. And I would actually say the
9 problem, while there has been some movement, and we
10 do appreciate the movement, it has gotten even worse.
11 Now, last night -- in a high profile store whose
12 owner, very recently and very publicly, received a
13 very large fine for illegally selling cannabis and
14 selling illegal flavored vapes -- I bought,
15 surprise!, cannabis vapes. This is half a gram of
16 Liiil Stiiizy, in Pineapple Express. I was able buy
17 BC 5000, which is the new name for Elf Bar, in
18 strawberry-watermelon, and I bought myself from...
19 Charms Blow Pops, while I was at it.

20 The Chair mentioned what schools are seeing
21 [TIMER CHIMES]... I'm sorry, I will talk very
22 quickly... and it tracks with what is happening at
23 the national level. The exploding youth use of
24 nicotine vaping has been accompanied by youth
25 cannabis use, and youth targeted marketing of E-cigs

2 is also happening for cannabis products. And as
3 Council Member Bottcher mentioned, these products,
4 both flavored vapes, which we know impact the
5 developing brains and lungs, and cannabis are not
6 harmless for children in any way, shape, or form.

7 Now, there was a lot of talk about data. In
8 response to parent concerns about this mess here in
9 New York City, we created a project called POISON:...
10 [CROSS-TALK]

11 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Thank you... [CROSS-TALK]

12 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: Parents Opposing Illegal
13 Sales of Nicotine... [CROSS-TALK]

14 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: You could submit your
15 testimony afterwards, thank you... [CROSS-TALK]

16 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: Sure, I just want to say
17 [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

18 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: so much. I... I... I
19 appreciate it... [CROSS-TALK]

20 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: I'm sorry... [CROSS-TALK]

21 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Yeah, but there's...
22 There's more people, so... [CROSS-TALK]

23 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: I apologize.

24 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Thank you so much.
25

1 COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION 52

2 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: Oh, he's saying I can go.

3 Can I just say one last thing? Is that possible?

4 Chair [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

5 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: I'm sorry, no... [CROSS-
6 TALK]

7 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: I'm sorry... [CROSS-TALK]

8 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: No, we are running behind.

9 Thank you... [CROSS-TALK]

10 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: I just want to support the
11 public awareness campaign and hope you will...

12 [CROSS-TALK]

13 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: I appreciate that...

14 [CROSS-TALK]

15 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: expand it for nicotine
16 vapes as well. Thank you... [CROSS-TALK]

17 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: I appreciate that.

18 MR. FLOYD JARVIS: Good day, Council. My name is
19 Floyd Jarvis, I am the Founder of Ganja War Veterans
20 for Equity and the Director of the Borough of
21 Manhattan Community College Cannabis Workforce and
22 Business Development Training Program, a no cost,
23 grant funded program focused on creating the
24 workforce for New York City, with a focus on persons
25

2 and communities that were directly impacted during
3 the war on drugs.

4 This will be my second time testifying before
5 this council. I was here earlier in January. I
6 testified earlier on the rise of illicit smoke shops.
7 I will make this as plain as possible. When true
8 legacy market operators had control of the illicit
9 New York City cannabis market, 11 year olds were not
10 able to purchase weed across the street from their
11 school as they have done in my neighborhood and ended
12 up in the emergency room. Which is why he is not
13 here now. Which is why I don't understand how The
14 Health Department's data didn't increase.

15 In Ansley Hamid's *The Ganja Complex: Rastafari*
16 *and Marijuana*, he details how after the passage of
17 the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, Afro-
18 Caribbean youth, particularly Rastafarian, came to
19 the United States, principally New York City, and
20 helped to fortify the cannabis market. They did this
21 while being marginalized, while being targeted, and
22 while being harassed and accosted by NYPD precincts
23 like the 77th Precinct in Crown Heights, who
24 notoriously cut the sacramental dreadlocks of
25 Rastamen when they were caught with weed and hanged

2 it up in the precinct, or even the more appalling
3 75th Precinct, in East Flatbush, who foolishly and
4 disrespectfully nicknames their precinct "Fort JAH",
5 would give out medallions that were painted with
6 Rottweilers biting the feet of locked and bearded
7 Black men. These medallions were given to officers
8 when they arrested a RAS. In spite of all this,
9 these young men were able to become successful [TIMER
10 CHIMES] paterfamilias -- A paterfamilias means a male
11 head of household -- through the sale of illicit
12 ganja. They opened up Ital stores, schools, and
13 reinvested their so-called ill-gotten gains right
14 back into their communities.

15 The late 1990's were followed by the early 2000's
16 and the now disgraced Guiliani Administration that
17 brought about TNT Tuesdays and Thursdays Tactical
18 Narcotics Units. Many herb gates were targeted,
19 raided, and eradicated. In place of these beloved
20 herb gates, pillars in their communities, popped up
21 corner stores and corner store owners that had no
22 real investments in their communities they served.

23 In 2014, these stores were found selling K2 to
24 our communities. We are here again in 2023, after a
25 hard fought battle for the passage of the MRTA, which

2 I was a part of as a member of the Smart Start
3 Coalition. We fought for fair and equitable cannabis
4 and pathways for legacy market operators like the
5 aforementioned Rastafari paterfamilias -- not new
6 corner store owners who circumnavigate loopholes in
7 the most progressive cannabis law in the nation, and
8 hide behind the guise of Yemini Merchants Association
9 to funnel sprayed weed and carcinogens to our
10 progeny.

11 Many people are afraid to call out this group and
12 its commandeering of the illicit cannabis market in
13 New York City, but I am not. Not while they are
14 sending our children to the emergency room. Thank
15 you.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSÉ: Thank you so much for
17 testifying today -- I am sorry, I forgot your name --
18 uhm, and for a lot of the advocacy you do. In 2015,
19 I was 17 years old, and the spark of the
20 proliferation of JUUL was wild to see in terms of how
21 it impacted myself, my friends, and now my sister,
22 she's 15 now. She and her friends all vape these
23 colorful Elf Bars and whatnot. And it is really wild
24 to see how big nicotine has made a comeback. Right?
25 Like, over the past 20 years, we saw that there was a

2 drop in smokers across our country, and I think it is
3 because of a lot of advocacy that happened from
4 groups like yours and tackling big nicotine both on
5 the state and federal level, to increase taxation for
6 some of these items, and things along those terms.

7 My question to you is ,you know, I appreciate
8 that you're here and we're speaking about nicotine
9 and cannabis, and I want to learn about some of the
10 work that maybe you are doing and lobbying on the
11 state or federal levels. And how ,you know, I or
12 maybe some of my colleagues can help in amplifying
13 your voice in that. Because, I feel like big
14 nicotine is winning this battle and bringing back
15 smoking to future generations. And we don't even
16 know the long term effects of what vaping is going to
17 have on the future generations of New Yorkers and
18 Americans.

19 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: Well, I couldn't have said
20 it better myself, so thank you very much for the
21 comment. And I will say that we were very involved
22 in Local Law 228, the passage of that law of 2019, to
23 make all flavored e-cigarettes illegal.

24 The problem here, so thank you... The problem
25 here is, again, this terrible intersection of

2 cannabis products being sold illegally, not by people
3 who have the legal right to sell it, and the illegal
4 sale by these same unlicensed retailers of these
5 illegal [TIMER CHIMES] flavored vapes. We reported
6 180 stores in six neighborhoods and two boroughs to
7 311, and the majority of those stores that were
8 selling the illegal flavored vapes were also
9 illegally selling cannabis. And there was a lot of
10 talk about data. We created a Google form that
11 parents could use on their phone. And our volunteers
12 went in our neighborhoods and cataloged. And if the
13 City has interest, it is simple to get the data and
14 keep the data. So, thank you again. I am happy to
15 discuss further. I appreciate it. As you said, we
16 cannot let the tobacco industry -- And we cannot let
17 unlicensed retailers harm our children, in any
18 community, with these products. So, thank you...

19 [CROSS-TALK]

20 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Thank you for that. Can
21 you share that information with our committee?

22 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: I would be very happy to.

23 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: I appreciate it.

24 I just want to really just focus in that this is
25 in regards to unlicensed cannabis retailers. And I

2 do here about the intersection. Thank you for
3 sharing that as well.

4 MS. MEREDITH BERKMAN: Chair, I have one... The
5 reason I came today was to say, we hope that given
6 that there is such an intersection that 995, that
7 what was why I should have led with that, so I
8 apologize for not being clear, not only do we support
9 995, but we would ask and urge that it either be
10 expanded to include a marketing campaign for minors,
11 young adults, and even parents, as your colleague
12 Council Member Bottcher said, about the harms of
13 buying these illegal products knowing that they are
14 illegal, and knowing the harm they can do to
15 children's developing brains and lungs. And for
16 kids, the really resonant issue, more than that, is
17 that this is also an environmental hazard. I mean,
18 we created a program Vapes are Trash to market to
19 kids, not only is it bad for your personal
20 environment, but these ,you know, disposables with
21 lithium-ion batteries and liquid nicotine, you're
22 doing terrible harm to the environment. Something
23 that WHO has also talked a lot about. So, we would
24 hope that there could be an expansion of Introduction
25 995, since there is this intersection, to include

2 messaging about the illegality of flavored vapes and
3 the harms that they can do to our kids. Thank you so
4 much... [CROSS-TALK]

5 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Well, thank you for
6 sharing, but I want to echo one more thing. It's a
7 hearing. So, the good thing is you are providing the
8 testimony. You are going to provide more of the
9 information, so that way we can adjust the language
10 as necessary for the bill. So, thank you for that.
11 So, that's... I just wanted to clarify that. So,
12 that way we are still in good timing for that. So,
13 thank you for that. Okay, we will...

14 MR. FLOYD JARVIS: Can I... I am requesting 30
15 seconds to speak?

16 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Oh, I'm so sorry, if you
17 want to submit testimony... [CROSS-TALK]

18 MR. FLOYD JARVIS: My colleague was given that. I
19 am asking the same.

20 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: No, she was asked a
21 question from the council members and myself.

22 MR. FLOYD JARVIS: You're correct.

23 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: So, that's why... Please
24 submit testimony.

25 Next is Council Member Erik Bottcher.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEr: Uh, Mr. Harris, thank
3 you for testifying on behalf of The Time Square
4 Alliance. You testified today about the
5 proliferation of illegal cannabis shops in Time
6 Square, the number of folks selling cannabis on the
7 tv trays out on the sidewalk in Times Square, we have
8 all seen it a lot. Are there any licensed cannabis
9 dispensaries in Time Square? There are not?

10 MR. TOM HARRIS: No, there are not.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEr: And have there been any
12 applications for any in Time Square that have crossed
13 your desk?

14 MR. TOM HARRIS: We had a conversation with an
15 entrepreneur who was looking to see if we would be
16 supportive of one on 8th Avenue by 44th Street. We
17 indicated that we were, and we have not heard
18 anything back from him.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEr: No applications? No
20 concrete sign of any legal dispensary anywhere in
21 Time Square. Can you imagine if there were no liquor
22 stores anywhere in Time Square, if there was nowhere
23 to buy champagne on New Years Eve in Time Square? Do
24 you think people would be selling it illicitly if
25 that were the case?

2 MR. TOM HARRIS: It's hard to speculate, but I can
3 say that we would be supportive if an entrepreneur
4 got a license from the state to sell. And we would
5 help them find a location.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Yeah, they would be,
7 right? There'd be... If you couldn't buy liquor
8 anywhere around there, there would be people selling
9 it. And that's what's happening. And there's no...
10 It should be no surprise to anyone that this is
11 happening. When you... When you legalize cannabis,
12 and then sit on... When the state legalizes it, and
13 then sits on their hands for a couple years, and slow
14 walks the approval of legal cannabis dispensaries.
15 It should be no [TIMER CHIMES] surprise that this his
16 happening. It is embarrassing for the state of New
17 York and for New York City. So, I am really thankful
18 for you, and everyone else testifying today, for your
19 attempts to urge the creation of legal cannabis
20 dispensaries in our district, thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Council Member Powers?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Thank you, nice to see you
23 guys. And when I was down at the other meeting, I
24 saw the esteemed Tom Harris in the chamber, I thought

2 I had to come up and say hello as fellow
3 representative of Time Square.

4 I think Council Member Bottcher probably touched
5 on some of the topics and questions, so I apologize
6 if I'm being redundant. But, I know you have talked
7 a lot about... We talk about the legal aspect of
8 this, but also ways to curb illegal sellers. You
9 have, I guess, two categories in and around Time
10 Square, those who are doing it on their own, and
11 those who are running storefront businesses and
12 taking away from those who are trying to operate
13 legally. And apologize if I am being redundant, but
14 I wanted to just come up and ask this question on the
15 record, which is, can you share some of your thoughts
16 and experiences on how the steps the Council or a
17 City or State, could be taking to help use either
18 existing laws or create new laws to help curb
19 those... And I say that under the premise, as you
20 know, that be both share a great desire to make sure
21 Time Square is efficient and operating effectively
22 and safe. Because it is the front door for the
23 entire world to come see New York City.

24 MR. TOM HARRIS: Thank you very much.
25

2 So, I think the first is the mindset. I think
3 that you need an extreme ownership mindset in The
4 City Council. There are... It's too easy to just
5 blame the state, but there are definitely things that
6 the City and The City Council can do. We had a four
7 point strategy that we thought would be effective.
8 The first one was to hold the landlords accountable.
9 The second would be to hold the operators accountable
10 through minor tweaks to the nuisance abatement laws
11 for those who sell to minors -- very narrowly
12 tailored to those sell to minors. The third would be
13 to increase the enforcement on either through The
14 Office of Special Enforcement or through an increase
15 in The Sheriff's Office. At the rate that they are
16 opening up, [TIMER CHIMES] The Sheriff's Office
17 cannot keep up with that. And, then, fourth is to
18 all get together, the entire community should get
19 together and lobby Albany and say that the same rules
20 that are in effect to close an unlicensed bar need to
21 be put into effect. And the swiftness needs to be in
22 effect for the illegal weed stores.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: Okay, I appreciate that.
24 The one question, then I'll stop, because I know
25 time's up, is the... I was out in the Upper East

2 Side recently a couple weeks ago with The Sheriff's
3 Office. They were going to a store. They found a
4 lot of illegal products there on the Upper East Side
5 right near a middle school in my district. And
6 they're feedback on that third point you made -- and
7 I'm not blaming the State. I agree with you on the
8 number two and number one, that I think certainly The
9 City Council, we have started and continue to do more
10 work to assist the State. Uh, but, The Sheriff's
11 Office had complained or raised concerns about the
12 fact that it is not getting that authority from the
13 state down to them to have effective enforcement. Is
14 that your experience as well or you understanding of
15 it?

16 MR. TOM HARRIS: Well, I would find a workaround.
17 And I think the workaround is through the nuisance
18 abatement law. If the City nuisance abatement laws
19 allowed for the immediate closure of an establishment
20 that sells two times to underage people, that would
21 be a very real deterrent for people. So, that is
22 something that The City Council could do on their own
23 through the nuisance abatement laws. More help from
24 the State, of course, we would like that. It's hard

2 to imagine that we are so far into this and it's so
3 screwed up.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER POWERS: All right, thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

6 Our next panel will be an in-person panel:

7 Christopher Leon Johnson, followed by Raul Rivera,
8 followed by Esther Lelievre.

9 MR. CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready? Ready? Uh,
10 hey, good morning, good afternoon. My name is
11 Christopher Leon Johnson. What's up, Chair? Yeah,
12 uhm, I'm for the Intro 995, but the problem is that
13 that's only going to do so much. First off, like
14 yesterday, uh, it was that crappy press conference in
15 Queens that The Mayor held about [INAUDIBLE]. Like,
16 first off, that's not going to do anything unless you
17 get the parents involved. That's the issue. You
18 need the parents. But, going back to this bill, you
19 know, you have to really start pushing for the ban of
20 these shops. I know I saw the Committee Chair for
21 Small Business, Julie Menin, who was here. But, the
22 issue is, she's not here to really say anything about
23 banning these shops. You have to start banning them,
24 and you have to start fining them. That's the only
25 what that this is going to work. Putting this up

2 with the education, it's just a waste of taxpayer...
3 It's, like, not going to do enough. It's only going
4 to go so far. You know? It's a great outreach thing
5 to do, but you have to do a little more than just,
6 uhm , put advertisements up. Because the kids don't
7 care. They don't listen. And they only just want
8 to... If they want to get high, they're going to get
9 high. That's the ,you know, it's just what it is.
10 It doesn't matter if you put age restrictions,
11 anything to that extent, it is still going to ,you
12 know, kids are still going to do what they have to
13 do.

14 And with the 311, you know, I think is a great
15 thing to do for the 311. You know, you have to have
16 a special line for that. But that really needs to go
17 to The Sheriff's Department. You have to have a
18 great relationship with The Sheriff's Department to
19 really start enforcing that. Because the other
20 agencies, they're not going to do anything. These
21 guys and gals don't care. Unless The Sheriff's
22 Department starts doing their job and start doing
23 more, and start cracking down, then you'll still keep
24 on having this happen. So, I'm done, thank you, I
25 appreciate it. [TIMER CHIMES]

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next?

3 MS. ESTHER LELIEVRE: Hello, thank you for having
4 me. Hi, I am Esther Lelievre, a parent, a public
5 advocate, and a medical cannabis patient, and founder
6 of a nonprofit.

7 I have done actual parent workshops and have been
8 actively going into the high schools -- and will
9 again this school year -- continuing cannabis PSA
10 education, not the DARE program, within the New York
11 City school system. I have partnered with OCM,
12 Department of Labor C Devion, Cannabis for NYC, and
13 different task forces to get cannabis education
14 workshops and community initiatives to get the
15 information out to the actual communities, including
16 seniors, students, educators, parents, and faith
17 based communities. Our organization's total data, as
18 of this year, has been roughly 35,000 New York State
19 residents, and willing to give actual data to the
20 Council in regards to specific issues in your
21 district.

22 In June, I partnered with the ACS Office of
23 Children Safety in injury prevention, cannabis
24 solution based workshops including CPS workers,
25 family enrichment directors, ACS. You can request

2 the recording from that agency. Within that
3 workshop, these different agency workers made a list
4 of exact issues that they are experiencing in the
5 rollout of cannabis legal industries. The lack of
6 information and education is the main issue that's
7 been happening in the city and state agencies.

8 Access to The Department of Health's website is not
9 easy for the public to navigate. We know broadband
10 accessibility is a huge issue and continues to be a
11 huge issue. I am offering to have a meeting with
12 your offices to produce data information needed for
13 educational campaigns and data aide solutions.

14 My solutions: Interagency training needs to
15 happen, which we have done with NYCHA's Smokefree
16 Division. The staff were not educated on cannabis
17 law or medical cannabis; More education on medical
18 cannabis programs. I am a medical patient, but
19 currently there are 330 cannabis children who are
20 medical patients in New York State, which is causing
21 disability and patient discrimination; Give more
22 information [TIMER CHIMES] and education workshops
23 for the differences between vaping, cannabis, K2 and
24 synthetic cannabis, because we keep putting it in the
25 same bucket, and they need to be addressed

2 individually, separately; More parent workshops,
3 community boards, and educational workshops and DOE
4 education workshops.

5 I am free to answer any questions that you may
6 have in regards to the work I have done.

7 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Can you do us a favor and
8 follow up with our office with the data that you
9 have? And we will also have a followup meeting with
10 you. Thank you so much for your testimony and for
11 all your work.

12 MS. ESTHER LELIEVRE: Thank you. No problem.

13 MR. RAUL RIVERA: Uh, good afternoon. My name is
14 Raul Rivera. I am a New York native. I am TLC driver
15 advocate. I am also constituent of District 13. And
16 we don't know what to say here. We are witnessing
17 council members and elected officials and people
18 complaining about marijuana, but this committee and,
19 uh, this state is pushing drugs. You guys are for
20 it. You guys are okay for it. So, you shouldn't
21 really complain about the drugs now. Marijuana is a
22 drug. Cigarettes are a drug. Beer is a drug. We
23 have kids dying, because they are smoking laced
24 marijuana with fentanyl in it. You guys are
25 promoting this. Can you look in me in the face? I

2 am trying to speak to you. Put your phone down, I'm
3 trying to talk to you. I'm a constituent from your
4 district. Can you hear me? Hello? Can you hear me?
5 You are destroying this city. This committee, that's
6 right I have two minutes. I got another minute.
7 This committee is a kangaroo committee. You are a
8 farse. You come straight out of a comic book. It's
9 comical what you're doing. It's comical. You're
10 destroying this city. You don't pay attention to
11 your district and your people. You can nod your head
12 all you want. You're gonna be part of this history
13 that is destroying this city. People know what
14 you're doing. You are a farse. You are character.

15 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Let's stay on topic.

16 MR. RAUL RIVERA: No, we are on topic.

17 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Okay, if you would
18 [INAUDIBLE]... [CROSS-TALK]

19 MR. RAUL RIVERA: I'm a constituent, don't
20 interrupt me. Do not interrupt me!

21 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: We either... [CROSS-TALK]

22 MR. RAUL RIVERA: This is my rights! Do not
23 interrupt me!

24 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: We either stay on topic or
25 you will be removed... [CROSS-TALK]

2 MR. RAUL RIVERA: Do not interrupt me!

3 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Remove him. Thank you.

4 MR. RAUL RIVERA: Do not interrupt me! This is my
5 time. You don't want to hear the truth. We'll give
6 you the truth whether you like it or not. We'll give
7 you the truth! (MIC DISCONNECTS) [INAUDIBLE]

8 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: And, with that, we are
9 done. Oh, wait, we have Zoom on virtual, thank you.

10 [TIMER CHIMES]

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you all for your
12 testimony.

13 Our next panel will be a Zoom panel, and the next
14 person to testify will be Kabir Gill.

15 MR. RAUL RIVERA: (SHOUTING CONTINUES)

16 MR. KABIR GILL: Good afternoon, City Council, I
17 am Kabir Gill, a rising senior at the Bronx High
18 School of Science, and today I am here to talk about
19 some problems that stem from the disposal of
20 unlicensed cannabis products.

21 Three years ago, my family got a dog named Cloud.
22 Cloud brought us a lot of joy and responsibilities
23 that I willingly signed up for, including long
24 evening walks where he would chase everything from
25 the city rats to dogs three times his size. These

2 evening walks became a highlight of my day --
3 something I looked forward to after a long day at
4 school. However, one night last fall was different. I
5 came home from school and saw that neither my dog nor
6 my mom was home. This was strange- my mom should have
7 been home making dinner, and it wasn't time for my
8 dog's walk. I looked around for a bit and then called
9 my mom, who told me what happened. My dog was in
10 emergency care, and the vet diagnosed him with
11 cannabis poisoning, which he probably consumed during
12 his walk earlier in the day. I rushed to the ER, and
13 when I finally saw my dog he was extremely lethargic,
14 and his veins were pumped full of fluid the vet had
15 administered. The vet told us our dog could have
16 died, and we were lucky to be within walking distance
17 of a veterinary ER. Others are often not that lucky.
18 The vet also told us that cannabis poisoning in pets
19 has become a leading cause of ER visits in the city
20 since 2019. This happens when dogs consume improperly
21 disposed and often unlicensed cannabis products from
22 the roadside. My research revealed that, unlike other
23 toxic products, dogs are attracted to the smell of
24 cannabis, and if there is something disposed of
25 unsafely they will seek it through that sense. This

2 pattern of pets consuming cannabis from the city
3 streets and becoming sick has become increasingly
4 common and has been featured on local news channels
5 such as CNBC. Vets and experts alike suspect that the
6 disposal of unregistered cannabis products is at the
7 heart of this problem. The vet we talked with after
8 our dog's incident suspects that illegally
9 distributed cannabis products are at the root of the
10 causes. This suspicion is due to the lack of
11 disposal options for unlicensed cannabis products.

12 Before I was affected [TIMER CHIMES] by this
13 issue, I had no idea how widespread it was.

14 However... [CROSS-TALK]

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

16 MR. KABIR GILL: after I looked in... After I
17 looked into it further and shared my experience...

18 [CROSS-TALK]

19 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: Excuse me, your time
20 expired. So, what we were going to ask you is to
21 please submit all of your testimony and we will
22 gladly accept it. Okay? And I'm sorry to hear about
23 your dog.

24 MR. KABIR GILL: Thank you, thank you for your
25 time.

1 COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION 74

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

3 If we have inadvertently missed anyone who has
4 registered to testify today and has yet to be called,
5 please speak with a sergeant, or if you are remote on
6 Zoom, please use the raise hand function,
7 specifically, David Schartz or Edward Zabliov
8 (phonetic). Please use the Zoom Raise Hand Function
9 to notify us that you are online.

10 CHAIRPERSON VELÁZQUEZ: All right, thank you,
11 everyone for showing up today. Sorry, you had to see
12 that nastiness, but we're good. Thank you, have a
13 blessed day. And we're closed.

14 [GAVELING OUT] [GAVEL SOUND]

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date September 25, 2023