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NYS HARM REDUCTION ASSOCIATION APPLAUDS GOVERNOR’S PROPOSAL FOR MARIJUANA REFORM, PLANS VIRTUAL TOWN HALL TO DISCUSS RELEVANT ISSUES

The New York State Harm Reduction Association (NYSHRA), a statewide network of harm reduction organizations and professionals, supports Governor Cuomo’s proposal to legalize marijuana for adult use. As proponents of sensible drug policy, NYSHRA believes that marijuana reform has the potential to mitigate long-standing inequities and disproportionate treatment of key communities, including people of color. To educate the community on the benefits of marijuana reform and considerations for implementation, NYSHRA is planning a virtual town hall on the topic (date to be announced soon).

“The legacy of the failed War on Drugs in New York is unmistakable,” said Joe Turner, Co-Chair of NYSHRA and President and CEO of Exponents. “For decades communities of color have been disproportionately harassed, arrested, imprisoned, and fined for possession of small, sometimes negligible, amounts of marijuana. It has contributed to ongoing distrust of law enforcement, among other divisions in the community. Our leaders are faced with a moral obligation to ensure that those who have borne the brunt of the War on Drugs are not forgotten in the new legal and economic structures established by marijuana reform.”

NYSHRA urges that marijuana reform be driven by an intentional effort to promote racial and social justice. The proposal to leverage marijuana tax revenue to support communities impacted by marijuana law enforcement will promote healing within these communities and empower local residents to participate in a new marijuana economy. However, the tax structure must ensure that marijuana does not become cost-prohibitive, which would maintain the status quo by relegating low-income people to continuing purchasing marijuana outside mainstream channels.

The experiences of NYSHRA members—which include clinical practitioners, peer and other social support systems, and consumers who use substances—affirm that legalizing marijuana can mitigate risks associated with substance use. Several studies also show that marijuana can be an effective deterrent to prescription and other opioid use, making it a crucial tool in combatting the opioid overdose epidemic that has overtaken New York State.

“We need every tool at our disposal to chip away at opioid overdose deaths,” said Alexis Pleus, Co-Chair of NYSHRA and Founder and Executive Director of Truth Pharm. “When you create safe, effective structures for marijuana use, you reduce stigma surrounding drug use and empower people to come forward when they’re ready to access the supports they need, whether that be drug treatment, counseling, or reengaging in other areas of social life.”

For more information, please contact Alexis Pleus at alexis@truthpharm.org or visit www.nyshra.org.

About NYSHRA—*The mission of NYSHRA is to introduce and promote Harm Reduction throughout all of New York State as a scientifically based treatment appropriate for substance use disorder, as well as a lifestyle approach to people who use substances. NYSHRA fulfills this mission on behalf of clinical and other providers, and the consumers they serve, through public policy and advocacy, public awareness, clinical education, and research dissemination.*