



**** MEDIA ADVISORY ****

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Black entrepreneurs launch coalition in response to deteriorating equity prospects in cannabis industry

Real Action for Cannabis Equity (R.A.C.E.) will aim to protect opportunity at statewide, municipal level

BOSTON, MA – Frustrated by reports that [only two of 184 marijuana business licenses](#) in Massachusetts are owned by people in state equity programs, and calling out racist efforts in Cambridge, MA to stifle minority business ownership in the cannabis industry, a group of black entrepreneurs and their allies are taking action.

On Thursday, they will launch **Real Action for Cannabis Equity**, or **R.A.C.E.**, a new coalition and 501(c)(6) aimed at protecting opportunity in the emerging cannabis industry for entrepreneurs, communities, and workers of color. Based in Massachusetts, R.A.C.E. will become the nation’s first trade association specifically formed to promote the interests of entrepreneurs, communities, and workers of color in the emerging cannabis industry.

Early moves by the nascent coalition will include a press conference at the **Massachusetts State House** on Thursday, a silent demonstration at **Cambridge City Hall** on Friday, and the launch of a **major voter outreach campaign** in various municipalities across Massachusetts.

In Cambridge, where the first of those voter outreach drives will begin, coalition organizers say equity measures are on the brink of being ignored or wiped out by what they have labeled as racist and cynical anti-equity lobbying efforts being bankrolled by out-of-state interests.

WHO:

Black entrepreneurs launching a new coalition aimed at promoting opportunity for people of color in the cannabis industry.

WHAT:

Press conference and silent rally to mark the launch of a major coalition effort and voter outreach campaign

WHEN / WHERE:

- Thursday, September 5, 2019, 3:30 P.M. – Press conference at the **Massachusetts State House**, 24 Beacon Street, Boston, MA, 02133
- Friday, September 6, 2019, 3:30 P.M. – Silent demonstration at **Cambridge City Hall**, 795 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA, 02139

DETAILS:

R.A.C.E. founders and a handful of key supporters will host a press conference on the steps the Massachusetts State House in Boston, MA on Thursday, September 5, at 3:30 P.M. to announce the launch of Real Action for Cannabis Equity, or R.A.C.E., a new coalition that aims to help the commonwealth live up to the social justice mandate enacted by its historic legalization initiative – a mandate that coalition organizers and black business owners say is being [eradicating at the municipal level](#).

The State House press conference will be followed by a silent demonstration outside of Cambridge City Hall on Friday afternoon, also at 3:30 P.M.

R.A.C.E. said the time of 3:30 P.M. was selected intentionally for both events because, according to the American Civil Liberties Union, black people in Massachusetts were [3.3 times more likely](#) than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession in 2014, despite similar consumption rates.

The R.A.C.E. voter outreach campaign will include direct mail to Cambridge “super-voters” and paid advertisements on both traditional and digital platforms, including on **Facebook**, **Google**, **YouTube**, and more.

“On the municipal level, this is not unlike the Jim Crow laws or civil rights struggles of the past, whereby higher-level mandates for equity are being intentionally or irresponsibly ignored on the local level,” said **Richard Harding**, an equity advocate and R.A.C.E. co-founder who played a key role in the historic *Campaign to Regulate Marijuana like Alcohol*, which helped legalize recreational marijuana through a ballot initiative passed by voters on November 6, 2016.

“Statewide, the voters have clearly called for legalization to be carried forth in a manner that promotes equity, but on the municipal level, from Brockton to Cambridge to Western Massachusetts, equity is being sabotaged,” said Harding. “We’re taking action to raise awareness and to protect the prospects for equitable opportunity and local business owners in an industry where market share is being quickly devoured by out-of-state, well-heeled investors who do not necessarily care about our communities.”

The Massachusetts ballot initiative included mandates aimed at promoting equity for communities and people of color who were disproportionately prosecuted, criminalized, and incarcerated during marijuana prohibition and the so-called war on drugs. Those mandates are not being upheld.

Organizers hope that the coalition’s advocacy and organizing work will help elected officials and regulators at every level refocus their efforts on the equity measures called for in the law and by the Cannabis Control Commission, which defines equity on its website as, “Equity is the recognition and accommodation of differences through fairness in process and result to prevent the continuation of an inequitable status quo.”

“Fairness is not being achieved in the process and it is certainly not being achieved in the result,” said Harding. “Unless municipalities like Cambridge step up and prioritize measures to promote equity such as those sponsored by Councilors Siddique and Zondervan, all will be lost in the effort to ensure this industry takes form in a way that accounts from the decades of oppression and exploitation from which it was intended to emerge.”

MORE DETAIL ON THE CAMBRIDGE, MA FIGHT FOR EQUITY AND AGAINST DESTRUCTIVE “COMPROMISE” AMENDMENTS

R.A.C.E. is backing a pro-equity proposal by Cambridge City Councilors **Sumbul Siddique** and **Quinton Zondervan** that would enable local entrepreneurs and empowerment applicants a two-year window to raise money and build out their shops before competing with well-heeled, existing medical marijuana dispensaries, which are not owned by applicants in state equity programs.

Supporters of the Siddique / Zondervan pro-equity proposal including R.A.C.E. say the proposal is consistent with the equity goals laid out by the ballot initiative. The pro-equity proposal, they say, is essential to making sure a fair percentage of the eight licenses up for grabs in Cambridge, MA go to economic empowerment applicants.

- Those same supporters say the lack of equity protections in the prior medical marijuana legalization process created an artificial “head start” for deep-pocketed, out-of-state corporate interests that are now trying to further consolidate their iron grip on the potentially lucrative Cambridge recreational cannabis dispensary market.
- R.A.C.E. organizers say the out-of-state corporate medical marijuana license holders are attempting to consolidate their grip on the market by boxing out minority applicants with scare tactics such as unfounded claims that current medical marijuana recipients would lose access to their prescriptions if new economic empowerment owners are allowed to compete equitably with existing corporate medical license holders.
- R.A.C.E. claims select existing medical license holders have also refused to guarantee they will take additional, specific steps to employ a higher percentage of employees of color, allegedly citing it would be detrimental to their business.
- Further underscoring the need for the passage of the pro-equity proposal, advocates for the out-of-state corporate medical license holders have allegedly made insinuations about economic empowerment applicants have been considered to be prejudicial by R.A.C.E. – insinuations that imply E.E. applicants are not qualified as business owners, and need to be “trained” by current operators before they could properly manage a dispensary.
- R.A.C.E. organizers say the corporate medical dispensaries have waged an expensive lobbying and public relations campaign to steamroll minority business owners through a proposed “compromise” amendment shockingly backed by former City Mayor and

current counselor Denise Simmons, who the black entrepreneurs behind R.A.C.E. accuse of pushing a poison pill at the behest of her campaign donors from amongst the corporate medical marijuana interests.

“Time is more important than money when it comes to questions of equity in the cannabis industry,” said Harding, a former Cambridge School Committee member and the President of the **Green Soul Foundation**, which is a charter member of the R.A.C.E. coalition. “Medical license holders in Cambridge who are trying to buy themselves a license that will instantly increase the value of their business by \$10 million or more by paying economic empowerment applicants an insulting bribe of \$250,000 to stand down in the fight for equity. It is sad that they have fooled some counselors with limited knowledge of the industry into thinking that this is fair.”

“You can’t open a cupcake store in Cambridge for \$250,000, never mind a properly operated and licensed cannabis dispensary,” said Harding. “The so-called compromise amendment would put communities of color to the back of the bus in this industry not just in Cambridge, but also across the state, permanently, due to the racist precedent it would be setting.”

Business owners like **Taba Moses**, President of **Green Soul Organics**, which has achieved a cultivation host community agreement in Fitchburg, MA and hopes to secure a retail license in Cambridge, say that proponents for the existing medical marijuana stores in Cambridge have engaged in pattern of racist and disingenuous tactics to block minority business owners from securing equitable access to licenses. Green Soul Organics is helping to fund the Green Soul Foundation as a non-profit arm dedicated to helping other aspiring minority business owners learn about the cannabis industry, hone their business plans, and navigate the regulatory process.

“It is racist and demeaning that the same out-of-state corporate cannabis operators who have pointed to us and implied we can’t be business people would try to buy us off with what amounts to petty loans and the so-called opportunity to be indentured shelf-space holders for their larger operations once they consolidate their market share,” said Moses.

“Cambridge is ground zero right now for attacks against racial equity in the cannabis industry,” Moses continued. “We’re sounding the alarm at the state level to let elected officials know that we won’t take these attacks on equity lightly. This initiative is our effort to combat a recurrence of the injustices that were perpetrated against our communities during the prohibition period. We must take collective action now, or those injustices will be unatoned and further exacerbated through the exclusion of people of color from this emerging industry. History will not look kindly on our cities, states, or nation if we do not recognize that we only get one chance to create an industry that is equitable and truly just towards communities of color. The time to take real action for cannabis equity is now.”

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ABOUT R.A.C.E

The mission of the R.A.C.E. coalition and movement is to unite, empower, and create maximum opportunity for communities and people of color within the emerging cannabis industry with a specific aim to raise up the voices of cannabis business owners and workers of color.

Founded and led by entrepreneurs and business owners of color within the cannabis industry, R.A.C.E. is an aspiring 501(c)(6) seeking to advance the interests of our community and of industrial equity through economic liberation, self-determination, business ownership, the rejection of tokenism, and through the promotion of community empowerment, skills-building, and political advocacy.

Whereas prohibition was weaponized against communities and people of color to stoke criminalization, brutality and incarceration, R.A.C.E. seeks and promotes avenues by which cannabis legalization may lead to the economic empowerment for entrepreneurs, workers, and communities of color in an era of rampant wage inequity, racial inequality, and prejudicial treatment by major institutions against entrepreneurs and workers of color.