

Uncertainty Over Impact of Massachusetts Recreational Marijuana Sales on Rhode Island Medical Marijuana Industry

Will next summer's opening of the recreational marijuana market in Massachusetts impact Rhode Island's medical marijuana demand? An industry leader and a government regulator recently expressed different views to committees of the Rhode Island General Assembly.

Earlier this month, Norman Birenbaum, the Principal Policy and Economic Analyst for the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation was quoted in the [Providence Journal](#) as telling a legislative committee that the recreational marijuana establishments in Massachusetts will not kill off Rhode Island's medical marijuana program. Birenbaum did state, however, that the effect on the Rhode Island medical marijuana market is a "moving target." Birenbaum noted that recreational stores would not offer some medical applications of marijuana, such as certain topical products.

Seth Bock, the CEO of the Greenleaf Compassion Care Center in Portsmouth, RI, presented a less promising view to a different legislative committee. To Bock, the CEO of one of only three medical marijuana dispensaries in the state, the opening of recreational stores in Massachusetts is his biggest business concern. Rhode Island medical marijuana patients must renew their patient cards annually, pay a \$50 fee, and pay for an annual doctor visit. Bock suggested to the committee that patients would rather cross the state lines and buy from the recreational stores in Massachusetts than deal with the Rhode Island costs and red tape. Bock also suggested that the General Assembly consider changing the length of the patient registration to three years.

The new stores in Massachusetts may also have an impact on the Rhode Island budget. In fiscal 2017, the three medical marijuana dispensaries collected approximately [\\$3.1 million in taxes from the \\$28.2 million in sales](#). If patients purchase their marijuana in Massachusetts, those taxes will go to Massachusetts instead of Rhode Island.

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