Marijuana Series: Governor Murphy Addresses Marijuana In His First "Ask Governor Murphy" Episode

February 14, 2018

Author: Brian P Sharkey

On February 13, 2018, Governor Phil Murphy participated in the first episode of his monthly call-in show on News 12 New Jersey, "Ask Governor Murphy." Governor Murphy was asked about a range of topics, including several about marijuana. That is not a surprising development, given that Governor Murphy campaigned on a pledge to legalize marijuana for recreational purposes and mentioned the issue in his Inaugural Address, declaring that "[a] stronger and fairer New Jersey embraces comprehensive criminal justice reform -- including a process to legalize marijuana[.]" Moreover, Governor Murphy issued an Executive Order on January 23, 2018, that directed the Department of Health and the Board of Medical Examiners to review all aspects of the State's medical marijuana system, with a focus on how to expand access.

In response to questions about marijuana during his call-in show, Governor Murphy discussed both medical marijuana and legalization of marijuana for recreational purposes. After referencing his Executive Order about medical marijuana, Governor Murphy explained that his Administration focused on that program first "because in our judgment that's much more life and death, or at least quality of life." Governor Murphy also stressed that he believed that it was important to make the medical marijuana program more robust because it could be a "major weapon" in combating the opioid addiction crisis, as expanded access could provide patients a less invasive and less addictive option than painkillers.

As to legalization of marijuana for recreational purposes, Governor Murphy acknowledged that legalization would lead to an increase in revenue and jobs, but that "the big issue for me is social justice." Governor Murphy also noted that he intended to learn from the experiences of other States who have already legalized marijuana, and he did not specify a timeline for when he hoped to sign a legalization bill into law. There are several bills relating to marijuana pending in the New Jersey Legislature, and there is expected to be significant legislative activity in this area in the coming months. To view the episode of "Ask Governor Murphy," please click here.