

Jones wonders if governments plans for marijuana sales cover concerns

By Bill Rea

The Province has planned legislation to deal with the legalization of cannabis (marijuana), but there are questions as to whether it covers all concerns.

Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones had some.

The federal government plans to legalize marijuana next July. In response, Provincial Attorney General Yasir Naqvi, Finance Minister Charles Sousa and Health and Long-Term Care Minister Eric Hoskins announced last week that legislation will be introduced later this fall, following the conclusion of province-wide consultations. The Province's approach will include restricting the use, purchase and possession of recreational marijuana to those at least 19 years of age. And its use will be banned in public places or work places.

The Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) will oversee the legal retail of the drug through new stand-alone cannabis stores and an online order service.

This approach will ensure that there will be only one legal retail distributor for cannabis in Ontario, and alcohol and cannabis are not sold alongside each other, a news release issued last week by the Province stated.

It added there will be about 150 of these stand-alone stores opened by 2020, servicing all regions of the province. Online distribution will be available across the province from July 2018 onward.

The government has also announced that illicit cannabis dispensaries will not be legal retailers.

The Province also plans to support young people and the vulnerable through the development of an integrated prevention and harm reduction approach that would promote awareness of cannabis-related health issues and help people make informed decisions about use. The approach will also include education, health and social service providers that work with, and educate, youth and young adults.

Decisions with respect to pricing and taxation will be made after further details are provided by the federal government. Final decisions will be informed by focusing on the objectives of discouraging consumption and eliminating the illegal market.

I wish there would be more consultation with municipalities, Jones commented, pointing out the location of these stores will involve planning decisions. I hope they're not forgetting these partners.

There will have to be a role for municipal public health departments, she pointed out, commenting the situation is similar as to when gambling was expanded. There was a percentage earmarked to helping people who got addicted or needed assistance.

This is a big change, and I don't think there's any value in rushing it, she remarked. You've got to get it right.

We've heard people across Ontario are anxious about the federal legalization of cannabis, Naqvi commented. The Province is moving forward with a safe and sensible approach to legalization that will ensure we can keep our communities and roads safe, promote public health and harm reduction, and protect Ontario's young people.

We are committed to getting this transition right, Sousa stated. When it comes to retail distribution, the LCBO has the expertise, experience and insight to ensure careful control of cannabis, helping us to discourage illicit market activity and see that illegal dispensaries are shut down.