

## Why I support cannabis retailers in Caledon

Written by Dmytro Basmat

I believe that the retail sale of marijuana will lead to a safer and more prosperous community.

Firstly, retail outlets will curb the black-market sale of marijuana. The underground business of dealing Marijuana will be phased out as legal competition begins. Consumers of marijuana will no longer need to worry about their own safety while purchasing the drug. Retail environments are safe and strictly regulated to ensure quality standards. This is especially vital for 'street' marijuana laced with lethal substances. In the wake of the overdose epidemic, knowing what is in your Cannabis is vital and could quite literally save your life.

Curbing illicit sales is especially vital in a municipality like Caledon because of its geography. For many Caledon residents buying in a different municipality is not possible because of the large distances they have to travel. Users will resort to illegal Marijuana simply because it is more convenient for them.

While Ontario's retail system remains controversial, competition between retailers will, in theory, bring marijuana prices down. Consumers will no longer be financially incentivized to buy illegally, thus leaving drug dealers out in the dark on marijuana profits. Illegal dealers will soon learn that what they're doing brings them no profit and will be forced out of the business.

The other huge concern here is around the sale of marijuana to minors. I completely understand this concern. As a candidate for School Trustee in the recent municipal election, my priorities were always driven around student safety, and there is serious cause for concern if you don't know the facts. The reality is, the maximum penalty for selling marijuana to a minor is 14 years in prison. Some have compared this to the sale of cigarettes and alcohol to underaged teenagers, however the penalty there is more than likely to be summary offence with a fine. Notice the huge difference? Retailers will be working extra hard to identify people that are underaged to avoid a large jail sentence.

Councilors and critics have pointed out a lack of details from the Province as an issue holding them back from voting in favour of retail outlets. While I understand the situation municipalities have been put in, I would like to point to the fact that alcohol is currently being sold in a similar retail fashion Province-wide.

I believe it is more important to immediately curb the illegal market rather than wait to opt-in to selling marijuana at a later date. I have personally seen the negative effects that an underground market can bring. In October 2017, one of my High School classmates was murdered over the illegal sale of 5 gram of marijuana. Caledon needs to join the majority of Ontario municipalities that will permit the retail sale or risk violence from the black market.

Finally, let's not forget the financial benefit our community will receive from marijuana sales. Canna-biz provides our Town an opportunity to reap the economic benefits of Cannabis consumption. After all, a better local economy provides residents with a better standard of living.

Despite my advocacy, I will be the first to admit that I would have rather had an LCBO-like entity control the Cannabis sale in Ontario, but it looks like we are stuck with this system for at least three and a half more years (until the next Provincial election).